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To the Editors

Life in all seasons

Thank you for a profoundly thoughtful essay by Rand Richards Cooper [October 25] on the ultimate implications of assisted suicide. He reminds us that life has four seasons and that we will be the poorer for trying to reduce the number to three. Winter is not a time of death but of a special and valuable kind of life—a life that speaks to fragility and support, love and remembrance, loneliness and friendship, and mortality itself. Snuff it out prematurely and there will be no spring.

In recent times we have heard all the cogent arguments against assisted suicide from ethicists, legal scholars, moral theologians, physicians. I suggest, however, that it will be the voices of humanists like Cooper (and poets like Jim Kacian, in his poem "Mortality" that accompanied the Cooper piece) that will finally move us as a nation to rethink the true meaning of life and death.

JOSEPH G. MURRAY
Quaker Hill, Conn.

A change of heart

Because I'm something of a soft touch when it comes to requests for help from people in need, I'm in a temporary budget crunch. So I was going to sacrifice my *Commonweal* subscription. Your issue of October 25 has led me to reconsider and make my sacrifice in other directions. Keep up the good work!

SKIP KNOBLE
Boalsburg, Pa.

CORRECTION ■ For the record, I wish to correct two points in Lawrence S. Cunningham's fine review [November 22] of my book, *In Search of Mary*. Professor Cunningham apparently worked from uncorrected proofs, which listed the price of the book at $12.95. In fact it was published at $14, perhaps because I persuaded Ballantine to add more illustrations. Similarly, the finished book did not describe Jill Raitt as a *Protestant* historian of religion. Thanks for calling this to the attention of readers.

SALLY CUNNEEN

Wilson's central point

Among other achievements, the U.S. Catholic bishops' recent (November 11) condensed restatement of their earlier pastoral letter on the economy should help put in perspective Don Wycliff's unfortunate depreciation [November 11] of William Julius Wilson's new book, *When Work Disappears*. The headline given the review suggests that the book was, in general, off the mark. On the contrary, it focuses on the most important problem of our inner-city residents, the lack of jobs, because this above all else triggers the pathologies that are ruining millions of lives. The bishops' new statement embraces this point, giving priority to the absolute necessity of jobs that pay just wages and provide decent benefits.

Wilson's book comes to us just as 4 million mothers who support themselves and some 9.6 million children by a combination of cash grants, food stamps, housing allowances, and free medical service will find these benefits terminated, thanks to "time limits" for welfare. There is today a notorious absence of sufficient jobs in the private sector in the near future. It's too bad that the review did not stress this aspect of the situation that Wilson's book addresses so centrally and so cogently.

EDWARD T. CHASE
New York, N.Y.

What Wycliff missed

In "What Wilson Misses" [November 8], your distinguished reviewer Don Wycliff missed the significance of William Julius Wilson's *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. In contrast to social theorists like Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead, who find the causes of poverty in the poor themselves—either for not taking advantage of open opportunities for all to work (Murray), or for not adhering to the American work ethic (Mead)—Wilson has made a significant effort to measure the relative impact and interrelations among cultural, structural, and social-psychological factors contributing to the "mind-numbing, spirit-killing, community-destroying" poverty experienced predominantly by African-Americans in the inner cities. Wilson's book demonstrates that there simply is no open-opportunity structure for the poor, and that most poor people do share the dominant social value of the desire to work.

Wycliff says that Wilson's policy prescriptions having to do with job creation are "familiar." Surely not as familiar as the policy proposals that are winning the day in this age of devolution, aimed more at punishing than at empowering the poor. In a recent conversation I asked Wilson whether our society's failure to acknowledge the reality of systemic social inequality and marginalization comes about because the society lacks a moral center; I suggested as well that his policy prescriptions imply a moral argument about the kind of people we want to be. Wilson replied that, as a social scientist, he has purposely avoided moral argument. But, he added, "if you are talking about a moral awakening, yes, I think we are in need of a moral awakening, but I will leave that job to you and others."

It remains true, I believe, that Wilson's work calls us, as a people, to reflect on how we treat the poorest among us and what that portends about the kind of people we are becoming.

ALEX KELLAHER MIKULICH
Chicago, Ill.

The reviewer replies:

Edward Chase's quarrel would seem to be with the headline of my review

(Continued on page 4)

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COMMONWEAL

December 6, 1996 / Volume CXXIII, Number 21

UP FRONT

Correspondence *Quarrels & corrections* 4

Editorial *Joseph Bernardin* 5

COLUMNIST

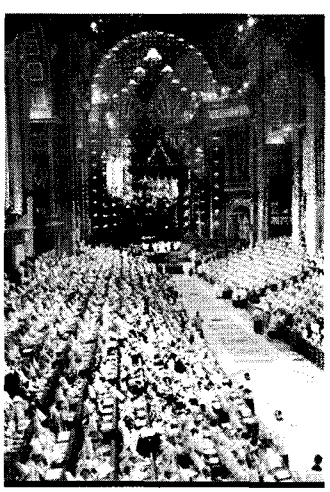
Democracy in decline
David R. Carlin, Jr.
Does the mania for freedom make us less free? 6

SHORT TAKES

What we voted for
Wilson Carey McWilliams
Last month's presidential election leaves the electorate, as well as both major political parties, fractious, cautious, and suspicious. 8

Pulpit politicking
Peter Feuerherd
The race for New York's Fourth Congressional District led some priests into temptation. Should clergy transform their pulpits into podiums? 9

ARTICLES



HOW THE VATICAN WORKS
Margaret O'Brien Steinfels
Tom Reese finds a lot to praise about the Vatican bureaucracy, but offers many suggestions for improvement. An interview with the author of Inside the Vatican. 11

THE LAST WORD

A little cello music
Valerie Schultz 31

VERDICTS

SCREEN

Looking for Richard
Romeo & Juliet
Richard Alleva
Doing Shakespeare for American film audiences challenges both actors and directors. 18

BOOKS

Inside the Vatican *by Thomas J. Reese*
Daniel F. Hoye 14

Critics' choices for Christmas
From England to the Bronx to Lemmon, South Dakota, and Notre Dame, Indiana, our Christmas critics report back on recent books that have beguiled, amused, and impressed them.

David Lodge 20
Kathleen Norris 21
Jack Schwartz 22
Valerie Sayers 24
David Gonzalez 25
Rosemary Deen 27
Bernard Bergonzi 28
Chet Raymo 29

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(Continued from page 2)
("What Wilson Misses") rather than with its substance. I certainly have no quarrel with his main point: that "[t]here is today a notorious absence of sufficient jobs in the private sector in the near future." I might add that it will be interesting to see in the months and years ahead how many employers are willing to take on the burden of employing people—welfare mothers, most notably—who frequently are so socially and educationally crippled that they simply cannot be productive workers.

As for Alex Mikulich, I suspect we agree on the need for a moral awakening. I'm not sure, however, that that alone will answer the needs of the "new urban poor." I am not persuaded that all the policy proposals that are "winning the day in this age of devolution" are indeed "aimed more at punishing than at empowering the poor." Some of them are honest attempts to find another approach to problems that have proved intractable for much too long and far too many people.

DON WYCLIFF

Middle East math

For the record, the assertion in your editorial of October 11 ["Undermining the Peace"] that more people were killed during the two days following the recent tunnel opening in Jerusalem than during the whole six years of the *intifada* is incorrect.

Approximately 85 people were killed over the two-day period: 70 Palestinians and 15 Israelis. During the six years of the *intifada*, December 1987 to September 1993, approximately 1,500 Palestinians were killed by Israelis and approximately 35 Israelis were killed by Palestinians.

The approximations are necessary because different human-rights organizations use slightly different time frames for the *intifada*. All would concur, however, that more people were killed in the *intifada* than in the two days following the tunnel opening: approximately 1,800 percent more.

JOHN F. MAHONEY
New York, N.Y.

The writer is executive director of Americans for Middle East Understanding.

Carlin's peeves & mine

David R. Carlin, Jr., *Commonweal*'s official voice of doom, is at it again, this time [October 25] bewailing the usurpation of legislative authority and the undermining of our democracy by liberal judges. Is that his real concern, or is it rather a smokescreen covering his discontent with judicial decisions on certain key issues?

Here in Louisiana a panel of federal judges overrode the legislature by redrawing the lines of an election district that favored the election of African-Americans. I listened hard but heard not a single complaint from the "judges-have-too-much-power" crowd; they agreed with the ruling. If judges consistently decided cases in accord with Carlin's worldview, would he complain about their power? Did the 1954 decision in *Brown* v. *Board of Education* seem to him an example of judicial overreach, or a courageous defense of racial justice?

Carlin writes about his pet peeves. One of mine is that every time Carlin writes about abortion and euthanasia he has to throw homosexuals into the mix. In this instance he predicts a "judge-made homosexual revolution," through which gay marriage will thrive along with euthanasia and abortion, while democracy will be dying.

I wear a gold band on the ring finger of my left hand. It represents my lifelong commitment to my spouse, who like me is a man. Together, we have pooled our meager resources and are paying monthly notes on a house in which upwards of twenty homeless folk in our town find hospitality, and where we have supper nightly with more than thirty poor men, women, and (!) children. We are members of the Seamless Garment Network and are known for our activism on behalf of protecting all life from womb to tomb. We pray and try like heck to live the gospel in a practical manner. Though, apart from this little skirmish, we refuse to take up arms in the cultural war in which Carlin seems to be a belligerent, we also decline to accept that we as homosexuals are destroying the values of Christian society.

STEPHEN DONAHUE
Baton Rouge, La.

The writer replies:

1. What need do I have for a "smokescreen," since I make no attempt to conceal my unhappiness with the substance of certain Supreme Court decisions? My complaint has to do with both method and substance.

2. Would I complain if the Supreme Court invented constitutional principles that I approve of? Of course I would.

3. Do I think *Brown* was (a) "an example of judicial overreach" or (b) "a courageous defense of racial justice"? Neither; I think it was a wise constitutional decision. Judges aren't paid to be courageous; they're paid to be wise.

4. I don't "throw homosexuals into the mix" when I write about abortion and euthanasia. It's the gay movement I throw into the mix. I have no objection to homosexuals; why should I? But I have a strong objection to the gay movement, which, along with the abortion and euthanasia movements, is part of the holy trinity of contemporary secularism.

5. To judge from his final paragraph, it seems Mr. Donahue and his partner are admirable. If it turns out that heroic Christian charity is typical of gay couples, I'll be happy to change my mind about the social merits of homosexual marriage. Until then, I remain convinced that extending marriage to gays will further delegitimize the institution of marriage—thus aggravating the enormous damage we have already done to children by treating marriage lightly.

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

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Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly except Christmas/New Year's; and monthly July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 15 Dutch St., New York, NY, 10038. Telephone: (212) 732-0800. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, ME 04106 (207) 799-4387, classified advertising correspondence to 15 Dutch St. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Commonweal, 15 Dutch St. New York, NY 10038.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, OH 44691. *Commonweal* articles also are available at many libraries and research facilities on CD-ROM and in electronic data bases. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional offices. Copyright © 1996 Commonweal Foundation. Single Copy, $2.25. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $44; Canada, $47; foreign, $50. Special two-year rate: U.S. $75; Canada, $81; foreign, $87. Annual rates for air-mail delivery outside U.S.: Western Hemisphere, $84; Europe, $89; other parts of the world, $99. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

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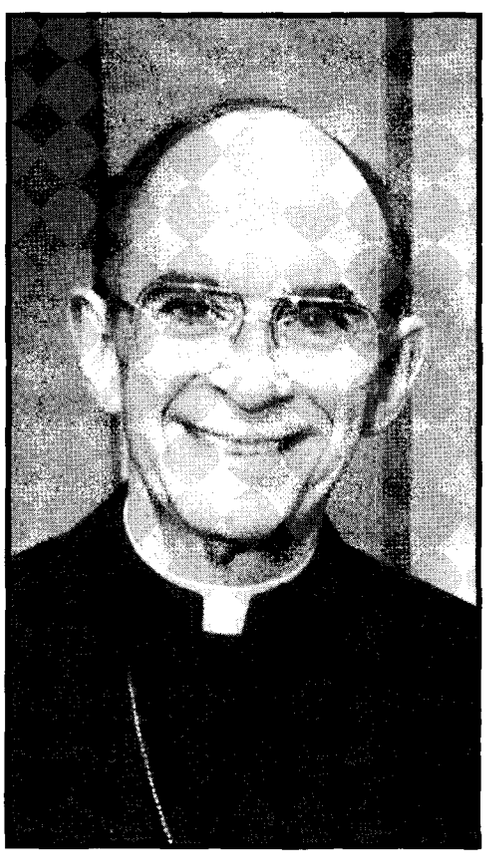
Joseph Bernardin

As Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's casket was carried from Holy Name Cathedral the haunting Taizé chant, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," rose seemingly unprompted from the congregation. Words and melody ascended and fell, died away, and returned in lamentation and hope as he was taken to be buried. Facing the back of the cathedral across the transept, three-and-four deep, the priests of Chicago looked bereft as their shepherd departed. The lamentation came from their lips too—certainly they are more vulnerable than the rest of us to the office of bishop and the character of the man appointed to fill it.

After his arrival as archbishop of Chicago in 1982, "Joseph your brother," as he introduced himself, worked to heal a wounded church. The homilist recalled the first meeting of archbishop and clergy: "To a darkened cathedral and a darkened archdiocese, he brought the light of Christ." Now their good shepherd was gone.

Fleeting and muted references in news coverage to the troubled tenure of his predecessor, Cardinal John Cody, served to underline the blessings of reconciliation that Joseph Bernardin brought to the church of Chicago: to its priests, to its people, and to the city as a whole. The funeral procession, with its splendid and diverse vestments and elaborate head coverings, attested to warm friendship with the Orthodox, with Protestants, Jews, Muslims.



Stories, jokes, encounters, and the acts of a generous spirit were recounted in the homily of Monsignor Kenneth Velo and in the witness of men and women—some 100,000—waiting to enter the cathedral over the two days and two nights that Cardinal Bernardin's body lay in state. Most notoriously, perhaps, he had met, prayed with, and forgiven Steven Cook, who had falsely accused him of sexual abuse. He had openly shared his fears during a first bout with cancer, and forthrightly acknowledged his coming death when the cancer returned. During chemotherapy treatments at the Loyola Medical Center, he greeted, embraced, counseled, and prayed with all of those who like

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him struggled to beat their illnesses. Finally he wrestled to accept that "death is my friend, not my enemy."

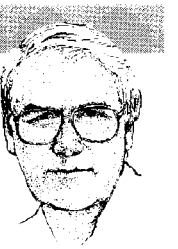
In his fourteen years as archbishop, Joseph Bernardin worked and planned for the future of the church of Chicago—a pastoral planning process that went on for years, frustrating, for at least some, in its endless consultations and parish meetings followed by yet more consultations and more meetings. But at last, a plan was created: priests and people of Chicago shared a rough consensus about their mission and goals, about their limited resources, and even about the questions that would have to remain unaddressed.

Bernardin worked to reconcile his brother bishops, most publicly in resolving the crisis with the Vatican over its brusque and irregular treatment of Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen. He chaired the committee that wrote the pastoral letter on war and peace, and through consultations, public hearings, revisions, and multiple drafts united the bishops behind a statement on nuclear deterrence. He articulated and defended the "consistent ethic of life," and drew his fellow bishops and the Catholic people into an understanding that embodies the fullness of Catholic teaching on the sanctity of all human life. In the last month of his life, he visited and prayed with a death-row prisoner in Cook County jail, because "neither of us has long to live." And in August, just before the return of his cancer was diagnosed, he called for a Catholic Common Ground Initiative—an effort to examine polarizing divisions among American Catholics. The critical response of some, he concluded, only underlined the importance of such an effort. He called us to see, in the words of his homilist, that "Common Ground was Holy Ground."

A key statement from "Called to Be Catholic," which gave grounding and argument to the initiative—"Jesus Christ, present in Scripture and sacrament, is central to all that we do; he must always be the measure and not what is measured"—could sum up Joseph Bernardin's life. Having been baptized in Christ, he lived in Christ and he died in Christ. And, as Scripture attests, he will rise with Christ in the last days. R.I.P.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.



DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE

Freedom exalted, self-rule diminished

We have all heard by now that voter turnout in the 1996 presidential election was 49 percent of those constitutionally entitled to vote—the smallest turnout since 1924. This may be a good sign, evidence that people are so delighted with the *status quo* that they feel there's no need to vote. More likely it is a very bad sign, evidence that vast numbers of Americans are disengaging from the body politic. They live *in* America without being *of* America.

We describe the American political and social system as a democracy, but that's a shorthand way of capsulizing a complex set of values. When we say a modern society is a democracy we normally have three factors in mind. First, the popular government factor: It is a political system in which the people, thanks to a universal franchise, have a significant voice in shaping government policy. Second, the personal freedom factor: It is a society with strong guarantees for personal freedom. Third, the egalitarian factor: it practices at least three kinds of equality—equality before the law, equal access to a broad range of public goods, and social status based on achievement, not on accidents of birth.

It is conceivable, indeed it is a matter of conspicuous historical record, that a social system might have one or two of these values without having all three. A society might allow for a high degree of personal freedom without popular government or equality (for example, a slaveholding oligarchy). Or it might have equality without either of the other two (for example, a Communist society). Or it might have popular government plus equality combined with a minimum of freedom (for example, the "tyranny of the majority" of which John Stuart Mill was so fearful). In the United States we normally assume that all three naturally go together. We figure that if any one of them disappears, the remaining two will be in jeopardy.

But the links between equality and popular government seem more natural than the links between either of these, or both combined, and personal liberty. After all, the ideal of personal freedom has often flourished in caste-ridden and radically anti-egalitarian societies. As Edmund Burke pointed out in a 1775 conciliation speech, no one is more passionately attached to personal freedom than slaveholders. This may be illogical of them, since their freedom depends on denying freedom to many others; but however illogical, that is the fact; and the very fact that freedom is not a common property but a rare privilege makes it all the lovelier. History provides plenty of instances of societies that prized personal freedom—for example, the pre-Civil War South and the feudal systems of Medieval Europe—while rejecting equality and popular government.

I've been inspecting American democracy recently, and I detect signs of trouble. I don't say things are so bad that the system is about to collapse; but our democratic health is in decline, and if we don't do something about it, this decline could turn precipitous in the next generation or two. Our troubled health manifests itself in three symptoms: atrophy both in

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equality and popular government, and the hypertrophy of personal freedom. Let's look at each of these.

1. *Equality*. The economic gap between the better-off and worse-off, a gap that roughly corresponds to the education gap between the better-schooled and worse-schooled, has grown larger in the last couple of decades. This double gap has been compounded by patterns of residential segregation, as the better-off have succeeded in putting more and more physical distance between themselves and their less fortunate fellow citizens, rather like the way higher-velocity galaxies have moved farther away from lower-velocity galaxies in the days since the big bang. In our case, the demographic big bang began with the exodus from cities to suburbs following World War II.

One is tempted to say that America is becoming "two nations" (to borrow Disraeli's subtitle to *Sybil*), except that it is more like three nations than two. America One is doing very well: good educations, good jobs, good incomes, good houses, good neighborhoods, good schools for its kids, etc. America Two, the working poor and near-poor, is barely keeping its head above water, and even this would be impossible if it were not for multiple incomes coming into the household. America Three, the underclass, has long since gone under and is drowning in the stormy waters of social pathology.

2. *Popular government*. The decline of popular government is apparent on a number of fronts. First, local government has become less important as state and (especially) federal governments have expanded their scope and powers; and for most people, of course, participation in government, if it is to take place at all, will have to take place at the local level. Second, governmental power has shifted increasingly from popularly elected legislatures into the hands of unelected career bureaucrats. Third, the federal judiciary, an unelected aristocracy with life tenure, has usurped many policy-making powers of democratically elected legislatures. Fourth, the influence of grassroots political parties, which traditionally served as instruments and schools of popular government, has diminished radically, being replaced by the influence of special interests, most of them money interests.

3. *Personal freedom*. In the meantime, personal liberty has been absolutized. It has become a sacred cow, an idol to which unqualified deference must be paid. At the person-in-the-street level, this is seen in the cultural ideal of "non-judgmentalism," which, carried through

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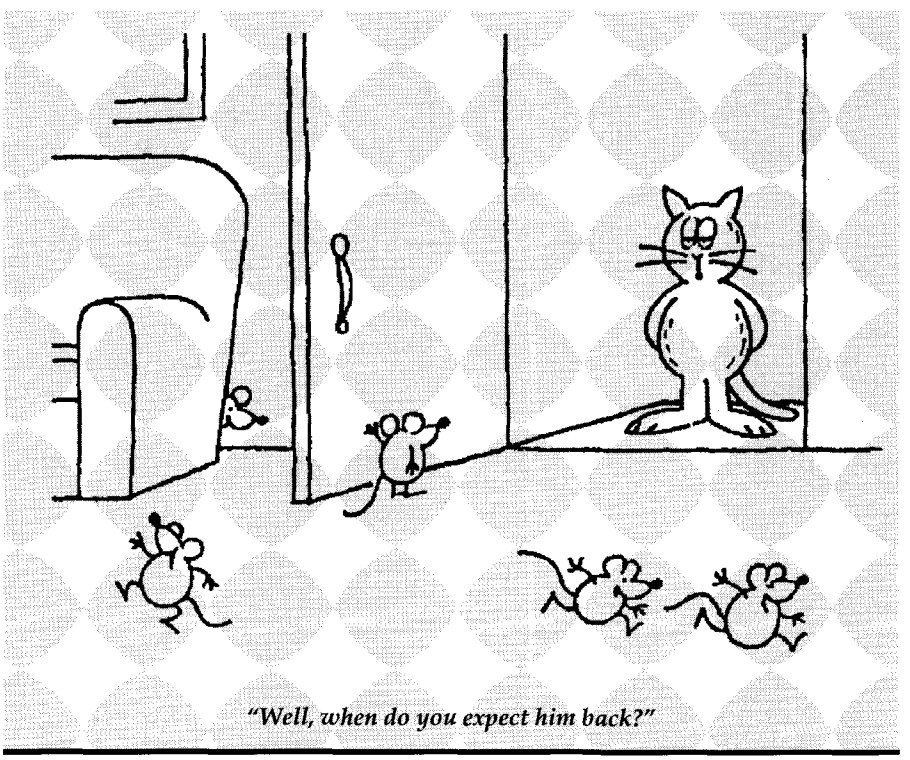

"Well, when do you expect him back?"

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to its logical conclusion, is tantamount to antinomianism or moral anarchy. At the judicial level it is seen in the doctrine of "privacy," which has constitutionalized the right to abortion and seems poised to constitutionalize the further right to assisted suicide. At the academic level, it is seen in the theory (of which Richard Rorty is the patron saint) that all pictures of the world are nothing but subjective "constructions," not controlled by objective reality; from which it follows that we are all free to invent whatever world-picture we like while rejecting competing world-pictures out of hand.

I recommend that the patient try a more balanced diet. □

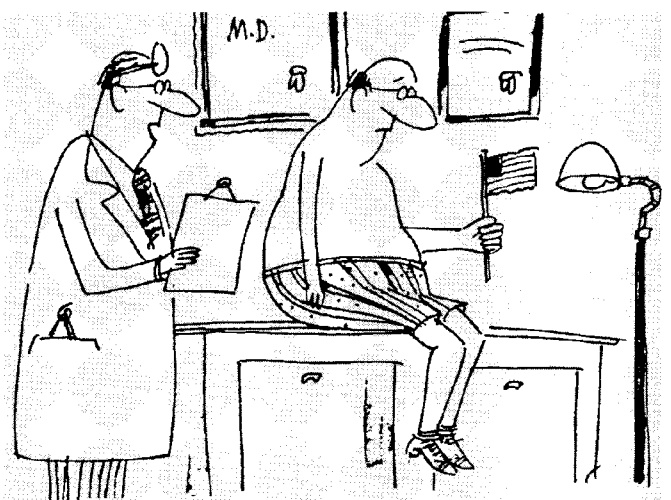
Wilson Carey McWilliams

WHAT WE VOTED FOR

Ambivalence, anxiety, & gridlock

In 1996, most voters didn't like the Congress or trust the president, but they reelected both. Ambivalence is the name of America's political game: we fear that government has too much power, but we also worry that it isn't strong enough to take on the problems that beset us; at least half-aware of how much we depend on government, we doubt its competence and its moral title to rule.

Mass democratic politics has become more expensive and more contrived, a contest of consultants as much as candidates, an exercise in technique as distant from genuine conviction as it is from everyday life. This year, majority rule was notable by its absence: only 49 percent of eligible Americans voted, the lowest figure since 1924. Here and there, citizens followed their better angels. "B-1 Bob" Dornan apparently lost to Loretta Sanchez in Orange County, California; up the coast, Walter Capps, a distinguished student of religion, turned a Gingrichite out of a seat in Santa Barbara; Carolyn McCarthy's old-Irish tenacity did in the N.R.A.'s empty suit out on Long Island [*see* page 9]; and as if to remind us that we are not naturally separated into islands of race, culture, and gender, voters in two predominantly white districts sent African-American women to the House, Cynthia McKinney winning reelection in Georgia and Julia Carson capturing the seat in Indianapolis. Still, such points of light only emphasize the general dreariness of the campaign and its result.



"You've followed too many political campaigns. You've become hype-tolerant."

The liabilities of the candidates were obvious, and while Bill Clinton had an edge where "vision" was concerned, neither party had a compelling idea of how to address our uneasiness about the future—the uncertainty of jobs, what feels like the steady erosion of social and moral resources, and especially our anxiety about increasing inequality. Americans tend to get a lot of their economic facts wrong, overstating unemployment and underrating job creation, but they are dead on in judging that the gap between rich and poor is getting wider and that the middle sectors are being squeezed, so that we are moving toward a two-tier society. And politics, equality's stronghold, has opened the gates to the barbarians.

This year, the impact of money truly troubled voters; the Democratic fund-raising imbroglio hurt Clinton, if only as a last straw. With reason: the presidential campaign alone may have cost $800 million. Organized labor spent a well-publicized $35 million, and was disappointed in its hope of overturning the Republican majority in the House. Still, money from the unions helped set the tone for the campaign: the GOP never recovered from the charge that it proposed to cut Medicare's budget by $270 billion, and the effectiveness of labor's campaign is indicated by the vehemence of Republican attacks on "big labor." In fact, business spent roughly seven times as much as labor, almost a quarter of a billion dollars, with upwards of 60 percent going to Republicans, so that labor's money only let the Democrats compete on something like equal terms. And the weight of money and the constant preoccupation with fundraising is more fundamental than who wins: Democratic in form, American elections are increasingly oligarchic in content.

There's enough discontent that we'll probably get some version of campaign reform over the next couple of years, but little chance that it will change matters much. All current officeholders, after all, have survived if not profited from the present system. More important, serious reform would have to get around the roadblock posed by the Supreme Court's 1976 decision, in *Buckley* v. *Valeo*, that contributions of money are speech, entitled to the protection of the First Amendment. It wasn't much of an argument—among other things, money doesn't give reasons—but until that ruling is changed (outgoing Senator Bill Bradley recently sug-

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gested amending the Constitution, if necessary), the rights of money will trump the claims of democratic civic life.

It doesn't help that neither political party speaks with a coherent voice. The Republicans' intramural troubles are evident: "mainstream" Republicans are contending that the party needs to become more inclusive, ditching or playing down the conservative social agenda; but the right wing—which mostly lined up behind Bob Dole, only to be humiliatingly ignored at the Republican convention and in the campaign—points out that a narrowly economic appeal is disastrous, especially in a time of relative prosperity. Since the supply-side tax cut failed to catch on, Clinton was able to focus debate on government programs, the Democrats' strong suit. In other words, conservatives can make a passable case that Republicans need a candidate capable of defining the contest in terms of cultural issues and some sort of "politics of virtue."

And on balance, the election may have strengthened the Right. To be sure, Woody Jenkins lost by a hair in Louisiana and social conservatives were beaten in Georgia and Illinois, but Jesse Helms won and so—among others—did Gordon Smith in Oregon. Meanwhile, moderates like William Weld and Richard Zimmer came up losers, so that the Republican caucus in the Senate took several steps to the right. Moreover, as the party's center of gravity has shifted toward the South, the GOP has become more dependent on religious conservatives. This year, the fraction of white, "born-again" Protestants voting Republican went up to about three-quarters, at a time when the party was losing ground among other constituencies.

But despite their militancy, social conservatives have played a kind of coalition politics. At odds with probusiness Republicans on so many issues, they have chosen to ignore the role of the market in tearing up communities and tearing down standards, and as long as they do, their defense of the decencies will sound hollow to the millions of Americans who know better.

Not that the Democrats are much better off. The party did get some good news at the polls: It did well among younger voters and it gained among Catholics and Hispanic-Americans. Still, Clinton won, the economy aside, chiefly by taking advantage of Republican mistakes. Positive support for the president and his party was limited at best: a very late, very modest shift toward compromise and moderation was enough to preserve Republican control on Capitol Hill.

The electorate, taken as a whole, simply didn't trust the Democrats to run the country. Liberalism, the party's closest approach to a public philosophy, is discredited with most voters. Republican ads attacking Democrats as "foolishly liberal" failed, more often than not, but—Minnesota's Senator Paul Wellstone aside—Democrats weren't racing to identify themselves as liberals either. For a quarter century and more, liberalism has combined an expanded idea of government's *responsibility* for social and economic life with an advocacy of individual and group rights and immunities that radically limits government's *authority*. Those contradictory pulls leave liberals with virtually no idea of the common good other than material well-being, and no way of asserting public power other than taxing and spending, as the sound bite has it. And while President Clinton has blurred the old distinctions on social issues, he has not provided his party with a new doctrine.

Sometimes, Clinton seems to lean toward reducing government's responsibilities, as he did when he proclaimed the end of the era of big government or when he signed the welfare reform bill, implying that government should follow, more or less humanely, wherever technology and the market take us. But at other times, he tilts toward an increase of government's moral mission, as in his hope—doomed, given this Congress—of "fixing" the welfare bill, or in his appeal to a "new covenant" emphasizing obligation. Democrats would be wise to encourage this second tack. Even when they can't articulate it, middle- and working-class Americans are learning the distinction between economic growth and well-being: the latter includes dignity, the sense of doing work that has value, of making a contribution to the common life. That good—the foundation of civic equality—is worth a considerable economic price: to think otherwise, as a great Democrat taught his party a century ago, is to "crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." □

Wilson Carey McWilliams's *most recent book is* The Politics of Disappointment *(Chatham House). He teaches at Rutgers and writes regularly for* Commonweal.

Peter Feuerherd

PULPIT POLITICKING

Butt out, Father

The 1996 election campaign was almost universally derided as a political season devoid of passion. But at least one campaign generated intense passion and along the way raised a question about the partisan role of at least some Catholic clergy. Long Island's Fourth District saw a heated battle between Democratic candidate and political newcomer, Carolyn McCarthy, and the incumbent Republican, Congressman Dan Frisa.

The Fourth District in Nassau County, just east of New York City, is an unlikely setting for any political battle. Its middle-class leafy suburbs are filled with Catholics who fled crowded, crime-ridden New York; and except for occasional outrages, the most famous being the 1993 Long Island Railroad massacre of commuters by a lone gunman, they have succeeded in finding security. The district is dominated by a Republican machine whose most famous graduate is Senator Alfonse D'Amato, and until 1996 there was barely a memory of a competitive race for the Republican House seat.

Carolyn McCarthy changed that. She was and is a regis-

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tered Republican, but she was the Democratic party challenger to Congressman Frisa, who voted against a major gun-control bill and received National Rifle Association campaign funds.

McCarthy, a nurse and homemaker, became a gun-control crusader after her husband was murdered and her son critically injured in the railroad massacre. The media have portrayed her as a quiet, ordinary citizen challenging a male-dominated political machine. (She won by more than fifteen points). Both candidates vied for Catholic support, including from local clergy who sometimes reciprocated. McCarthy, who is a Catholic, was supported by a local priest who spoke glowingly of her in election-season Sunday sermons, praising her recovery from tragedy and her campaign against violence.

She drew the wrath of some Catholics after a *Newsday* article reported that she was not only prochoice on abortion (citing her nursing experience caring for women hospitalized after illegal abortions in pre-*Roe* days), but also supported President Bill Clinton's veto of the partial-birth abortion bill. She later backed away from that stance in a televised debate. But in the course of the campaign, she also dropped her opposition to the death penalty, saying that if she were elected she would follow her constitutents' lead on the subject. Despite her backtrack on the partial-birth abortion veto, McCarthy's prochoice position generated outrage among pro-life Catholics. One priest prominent in the movement invited Frisa, a Protestant, to read the Prayers of the Faithful at Sunday Mass, and spoke enthusiastically of Frisa's anti-abortion stance.

A Catholic case could have been made for either candidate. But the strongest Catholic case should be against clerical meddling. I am not talking about a violation of the law here: as far as I know, there were no overt endorsements issued in any Catholic church building. And before the faxes from the Catholic League start churning, let me make it clear: I'm a believer in free speech, even political utterances from clergy. But the right of the clergy to speak as citizens doesn't mean that right should be exercised in a blatantly partisan way. For one thing, quasi-endorsements, often done with a wink and a nod, don't work: the photo-ops with prominent bishops taken by candidates George Bush and Robert Dole in the last two presidential elections didn't help with Catholic voters, nor did retired New Orleans Archbishop Philip Hannan's claim that it was a sin to vote Democratic in 1996. Republican strategists have learned the hard way that bishops and priests rarely deliver votes for their favored candidates.

Furthermore, when clergy spend precious moral capital on partisan politics, their moral authority to speak on other public concerns is diminished. One parishioner who attended the Mass that included Frisa saying the Prayers of the Faithful told me that, though he was supportive of the Republican, he was planning to switch his vote to protest the priest's heavy-handed tactics. I'm sure similar cases of pique could be found among those who heard pro-McCarthy sermons.

In the age of the laity, quasi-endorsements also come across as highly clericalist. Politics is the work of the laity. John Paul II's admonition early in his pontificate forbidding priests to hold elective office made that clear. Sure, priests should articulate moral principles, even those that have political impact. And I'm certain that politicians probably need more spiritual support than the average person, so close friendships with candidates and political leaders should be unobjectionable. But the partisan realm—the nuts and bolts of endorsements, political horse-trading, strategizing, and holding office—should be left to lay people. In the Long Island race, the use of the pulpit to issue quasi-endorsements was particularly troublesome. As the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago noted, bitterly divided Catholics should be able to find common ground around the eucharistic table, a sign of our unity as Catholics. Endorsements from the pulpit are a violation of that unity.

Do people come away from such liturgies with the sense that the celebrant is telling his congregation that there is only one legitimate political choice for Catholics? And if they come away with that perception, do they follow it like sheep or resent it? In either case, the church's moral authority is squandered for dubious ends. □

Peter Feuerherd *is assistant editor of the* Long Island Catholic *and national affairs writer for the* National Catholic Register.

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HOW THE VATICAN WORKS

An interview with Thomas J. Reese

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Inside the Vatican *(Harvard University Press) by Thomas J. Reese, S.J., was published December 1. Reese, a political scientist and a fellow at the Woodstock Center, Georgetown University, has previously written about the American hierarchy* (Archbishop, *Harper & Row) and the U.S. bishops' conference* (A Flock of Shepherds, *Sheed & Ward).* Inside the Vatican *is, in part, an organizational study of how the Vatican works and, in part, a look at the culture that supports the system* [see *review, page 14*]. *This interview with Reese was conducted in his office at the Woodstock Center.*

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS: What was the most surprising thing you found in doing *Inside the Vatican*?

■ THOMAS REESE: I was surprised how many Vatican people talked to me. I was afraid I would get there and no one would. I interviewed over a hundred people. I couldn't have done the book without them. For the most part, they let me tape the interviews. Most didn't want to be quoted. The higher you went, the more willing people were to be quoted. The people from below knew their careers could not be advanced by being quoted, and that they could be ruined.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had no problem being quoted, nor did Cardinal Edward Cassidy. I had asked for five or ten minutes, yet Cardinal Ratzinger talked to me for forty-five minutes to an hour. He was very pleasant, very gracious. The interview was in English, which he speaks very well. I try to let the players speak for themselves. Ratzinger should be able to make his case, to explain what he's doing and how his congregation works.

STEINFELS: *Inside the Vatican* gives a real sense of how the Vatican works. That will be part of its value to people. I assume most of this is a mystery to most of the world.

■ REESE: Oh, it is. It's a mystery to most bishops.

STEINFELS: The book raises questions about decision making, staffing, access to information, and other "style" questions.

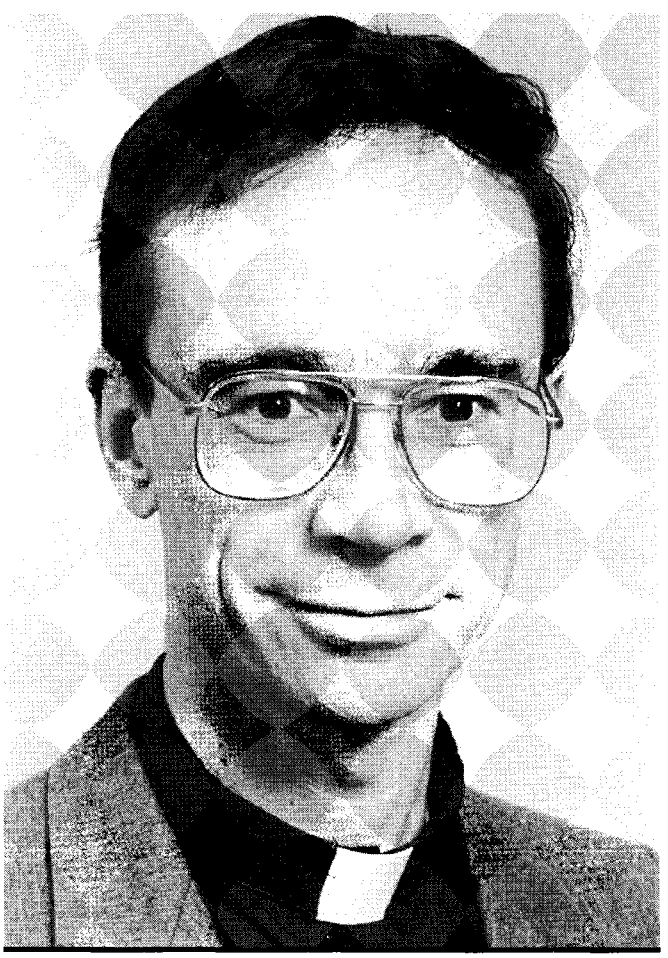
■ REESE: One of the fascinating things, and one I found difficult to do, was not only to describe the structure of the organization, but also its internal culture. That's why I talk about the impact of Italian culture and the European educational system on how Vatican officials think about bureaucracy; how they think about the role of teachers and how teachers teach.

It's not only a change of structures that's needed, but a change of mentality. What is the role of the papacy? What are the goals of the church? What should the church look like? To answer those questions, you have to go beyond social science to a theological vision of the church. I tried to save most of that to the last chapter because I wanted to be as purely descriptive as I could be. Once I did that, I knew people would want to know: "Well, what do we do now to make this institution work better?"

STEINFELS: As a political scientist, you make a good case that the curia is the most efficient bureaucracy in the world.

■ REESE: Efficiency is a measure of input vs. output. It's a question of what you think its output is. Or what you think they should be doing.

The Catholic church, for all of its hierarchical structure, has one of the flattest hierarchies in the world: the pope, bish-



Margaret O'Brien Steinfels *is the editor of* Commonweal.

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ops, priests, and laity. For a billion-member organization to have only four levels is extraordinary. If you take a look at the U.S. government or any kind of corporation, you will find twenty, thirty, forty levels of bureaucracy between the persons at the highest and the lowest levels.

STEINFELS: You have a nice line in the book: "The curia is a product of history and not of management theory." A blessed condition?

■ **REESE:** Absolutely. What makes this flat structure work are: First, the role of the pope in appointing bishops. He appoints people who basically agree with him. That means you don't have to do a lot of supervision. You don't have to tell them what to do. They're already trained and on board to do what you want them to do.

Second, there is the whole socialization process of seminaries and priestly culture and education that goes into the training of bishops. It's not like you hire someone off the street. Those are the kinds of things that make it work, that the major participants bring to the organizational structure.

STEINFELS: The curia's preferred style of decision making is consensus. If something doesn't get substantial agreement, it goes back for more work, or for a decent burial. Does this work?

[The bishops] are too easily put off by curial officials saying "we've never done it that way." O'Connor dealt with the bureaucracy of the U.S. Navy, so he's not going to be intimidated by the Vatican bureaucracy.

■ **REESE:** It works in many cases. For example, if the Vatican is working on a document and they can't get consensus, it gets delayed, delayed, delayed. It can take a decade for a document to get out of the curia. That's not a bad situation.

On the other hand, decisions sometimes have to be made. A new bishop has to be appointed; you can't wait ten years. Or you have a situation where someone is seeking redress of an injustice. Then, the delay can be harmful.

Sometimes the delay and desire for consensus are helpful, sometimes hurtful. For example, the reform of Vatican finances took much longer than was necessary because of the desire to have consensus. Until they brought in Cardinal Edmund Szoka [former archbishop of Detroit], who knows how to make decisions, little happened. Without consensus but with the support of the pope, he reformed the Vatican's finances. He made enemies by doing what needed to be done.

STEINFELS: A favorite American proposal for decision making in the Catholic church is more democracy: clear-cut, someone wins, someone loses.

■ **REESE:** The American bishops don't operate on that principle. Their preferred style of operation is consensus and compromise. Most things need a two-thirds vote.

But using the word consensus about curial decision making can be a little bit misleading. It's like *Animal Farm*; some animals are more equal than others. Cardinal Ratzinger is more equal than other officials in the curia when it comes to issues of doctrine. He has the ability to simply say this will not be published until it's revised.

STEINFELS: People defer to him? We're not talking consensus here.

■ **REESE:** Oh, absolutely. But there will be long, long discussions, and sometimes he can be persuaded.

STEINFELS: Look at it the other way. Could he ever publish something himself about which there is wide disagreement among his colleagues?

■ **REESE:** Yes, he's able to publish things without much consultation with the rest of the curia. This has gotten him into trouble: for example, his first document on liberation theology. Even the pope ended up saying that this was not a defensible statement and that he himself was going to come out with something more nuanced, and he did.

On the other hand, Cardinal Ratzinger operates within the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. You have to remember that many cardinals from other curial offices, and cardinals from around the world, are on his congregation. He would take documents to them and also to his consultors. Normally, the documents that come out of his congregation are fairly well studied and discussed before he approves them. He meets on a weekly basis with the pope. If he and the pope decide to do something, it's going to happen no matter what any other cardinal in the curia or on his congregation thinks.

STEINFELS: The curia has an interconnecting set of officials; cardinals head their own congregations and serve on others. Yet, you give the impression that people don't know what goes on in other offices. Don't overlapping personnel produce an overlapping understanding?

■ **REESE:** The overlapping occurs only at the very highest levels. Below that, people are out of the loop. And then, some of the congregations meet rarely. You have a lot of isolation. It would be very rare for someone in an office to pick up a phone and call somebody in another office to find out what they're doing. If you don't have a friend in another congregation, you're not going to get much information.

STEINFELS: But surely there is social interaction among people who are friends or were together in the seminary.

■ **REESE:** Yes, there is. But that's it, you just don't call someone in an office. You meet someone over lunch who's an old friend, or you have someone introduce you to someone. There's communication among nationality groups. There's communication especially among the Italians who have gone to the same seminaries, the Collegio Romano or the Lateran. Probably the best communication goes on among the career Vatican officials, the ones that went through the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, who were trained to become diplomats, and who work in the curia.

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STEINFELS: The internationalization of the curia has been much spoken of, but your book gives the impression that that trend is modified by people being "Vaticanized" and "Italianized," living in Italy and speaking Italian.

■ **REESE:** They are trained into the system and buy into the culture of the system. If they don't like the culture, they don't stay. They go home as fast as they can.

STEINFELS: So there is less than meets the eye when it comes to internationalization?

■ **REESE:** Yes. Even among the staunchest Vatican supporters, there's concern about good people. A lot of local bishops don't want to lose their best people to Rome.

STEINFELS: You propose rotation of the curial staff, particularly clergy, out of the Vatican. You propose term limits. You also propose that one way to change the curia is not to reward Vatican service by making people bishops. I would assume that some proportion of the people who work in the Vatican do so because that is exactly what they hope for.

■ **REESE:** Those are the ones you want to get rid of!

STEINFELS: Yes and no.

■ **REESE:** Yes and no?

STEINFELS: It's a bit like the term-limits debates in this country. You can change the state legislature every eight years but the learning curve becomes a serious issue: many of the people working in the institution don't really know how it works. Apply that to the Vatican.

■ **REESE:** Every reform has positive and negative consequences. A negative consequence of cycling people in and out of the curia is that you would lose some very good people who have learned on the job.

On the other hand, there is a great value in having people with pastoral experience working in the Vatican. Maybe it's just a question of a sabbatical year, of going back, being in a parish, celebrating liturgies, hearing confessions—being a priest! After doing that for a year in your own culture, then come back to Rome. Some of these people would come back a different person. Suddenly, they would realize that there's an awful lot going on in the local Christian communities that is much more important than the papers that they are moving in their Vatican jobs. That's the kind of change I would like to see. Nobody is so irreplaceable that they couldn't go off for a year's sabbatical back to their own diocese.

STEINFELS: The appointment of papal nuncios [diplomats who represent the Holy See in capitals around the world] is critically important in the appointment of bishops. They send the names of priests to be nominated bishop to Rome. You don't say much about how nuncios wind up where they do. What kind of process is involved?

■ **REESE:** I didn't get enough information on this. People say that a man becomes a nuncio as long as he sticks around and doesn't make any mistakes. He might serve on the staff in a small country in Africa or Asia, but would eventually become an archbishop and a nuncio. On the other hand, those people who rise to the very top, who get Paris,

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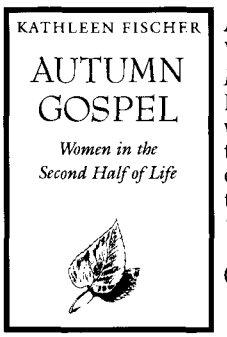

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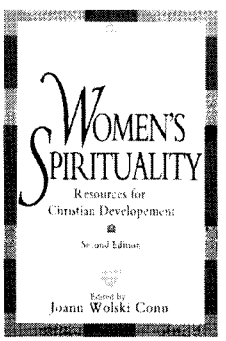

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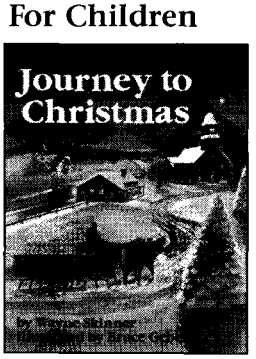

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London, Washington, tend to be people who have made friends. They have had patrons who are cardinals or the secretary of state.

STEINFELS: You write that Paul VI in appointing Archbishop Jean Jadot to the United States was particularly concerned about the reputation of the American hierarchy being better businessmen than pastors. Archbishop Jadot recommended clergy for the episcopate who seemed to be more pastoral and had more experience in parishes. Yet Jadot was apparently punished for doing what Paul VI wanted.

REESE: Jadot is a fascinating example. He was not a member of the diplomatic service, did not go to the Ecclesiastical Academy. Paul VI went outside to appoint him because of this desire to find bishops who were pastoral.

I have my own spin on what Paul VI really meant in asking for more pastoral bishops in the United States. It had a lot to do with the style of being a bishop. Remember what was going on at the time. There was conflict between the U.S. clergy and bishops. I think Paul VI was concerned about this. What he and Jadot looked for were priests who were respected by their peers. I think that's what he meant by pastoral bishops. He wanted peace between the bishops and their clergy, because if they're fighting, you have a very bad situation in the church. As a side effect of those choices, you also got bishops who were good in dealing with the laity. Today there is not this fighting in the streets, demonstrating, picketing of bishops by their clergy. So finding priests who are respected by their peers is no longer a priority in Rome. Instead, they look for people who will follow the Vatican on doctrine and discipline.

STEINFELS: Although bishops from around the world are appointed to Vatican congregations, many of them never participate because they must go to Rome for meetings but can't. Yet, you quote Cardinal John O'Connor of New York, who serves on the Congregation for Bishops, as saying that he calls in his vote for the selection of bishops. This seems like a perfectly fine idea. Why doesn't everybody call in his votes? Or consult through conference calls?

REESE: Only O'Connor has the chutzpah to go tell the pope that he wants to call in his votes and the pope says sure. That's my guess. O'Connor is not afraid of anybody. That's one of his great virtues. He is not afraid of the media. He is not afraid of the president. He is not afraid of the curia. He says what he thinks. I think he knew he couldn't fly to Rome for every one of the congregation's meetings, but he want-

ECCLESIASTICAL SCIENCE

Inside the Vatican
Thomas J. Reese, S.J.
Harvard University Press, $24.95, 352 pp.

Daniel F. Hoye

Tom Reese is at it again. His third take on the ecclesiastical world from a political scientist's perspective involves the inner workings of the Vatican. First he told us how archdioceses work (*Archbishop: Inside the Power Structure of the American Church*, Harper & Row). Then he did what many said was impossible: He made sense of the operations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference (*A Flock of Shepherds: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, Sheed & Ward). Now, working with little hard data and lots of anonymous sources, he explains the inner workings of the Vatican in such a noninflammatory manner that I doubt he'll be promoting the book on the talk-show circuit. Nevertheless, it is a very useful reference for those who want to know how the Holy See operates...or at least how it is organized to operate.

Without a doubt, Reese's treatment of papal elections will be a very valuable reference tool when the successor of John Paul II is elected. He explains the process in a clear, illuminating manner. The media would be well advised to book Reese now as a commentator for the next conclave.

A strong case is made for appreciating the radical nature of one of the procedural changes in papal elections introduced by John Paul II. Reese stresses the importance of recognizing that, after twelve days or so, an absolute majority of electors can decide to change the two-thirds requirement to that of an absolute majority. Supporters of a candidate who received only an absolute majority early in the process, Reese concludes, would only have to wait until the rules could be changed in favor of their candidate.

With more comfortable living quarters and no cardinals over eighty who might be less inclined to wait the twelve days, Reese argues, it is more likely that an absolute majority could play the waiting game to get the man they want rather than supporting a compromise candidate who would be supported by two-thirds of the electors.

While I appreciate Reese's argument, I suspect the cardinals would move toward a compromise well before the twelve days in order to avoid giving the impression that the new pope may not have enjoyed the support of two-thirds of the electors.

Inside the Vatican was probably the most difficult book of the series for Reese to research. His written sources are somewhat limited and he had to rely on (mainly) anonymous oral interviews.

If we were to apply a type of biblical source criticism to the book, we could try and guess who a particular anonymous source might be. For example, Cardinal Pio Laghi, when he was nuncio in the United States, often used analogies to describe his role. "I am like a kidney," he would say, "I filter all that is going on and report to my superiors." Might he be the source that says, "[Being a curial prefect] is like a train....The instructions are just to change this locomotive from the railroad system that I was working in and place it in another"?

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ed to be involved. He took steps to make sure he was. I'm impressed.

▒ **STEINFELS:** Why don't bishops on all of the congregations do the same thing?

■ **REESE:** They are too easily put off by curial officials saying "we've never done it that way." O'Connor dealt with the bureaucracy of the United States Navy, so he's not going to be intimidated by the Vatican bureaucracy.

▒ **STEINFELS:** But this is a small measure that might make some difference in the way the curia functions.

■ **REESE:** Sure, sure. The ability of the pope and the Vatican to consult electronically with bishops around the world is here. There's no reason why a congregation couldn't meet on the internet and transmit documents and allow discussions and votes to go on.

▒ **STEINFELS:** Outsiders are particularly fascinated by the idea of a centralized church and vesting a powerful form of moral authority in one individual and one institution.

■ **REESE:** I agree with them. I like having a pope. I like having a central authority. You see the kind of media attention that the pope gets because he is this central authority. It's nice to have someone like that who can talk about Bosnia, about Rwanda, about refugees, about justice, about a culture in disintegration. These are valuable and important things.

At the same time, there's a need to empower people on the local level to deal with their own problems and to build the church in their own culture, not simply sit back and wait for the pope to solve their problems.

The difficulty is that it is always presented as an either/or situation. We either have to have a centralized church or we're going to have pure democracy or pure decentralization. The real challenge is to find what are the proper roles for the Vatican and what are the proper roles for local bishops and for local Christian communities. Empower both to do what they should do.

▒ **STEINFELS:** Style questions—of leadership, of consulting, even of conversation—are very important in such a large church.

■ **REESE:** Style questions are important. We Americans need to understand that. We often come across to Europeans, Italians, as brash and undiplomatic, almost impolite in our bluntness.

On the other hand, when the Vatican does become blunt and clear, we consider them authoritarian. One Italian-American I interviewed had begun to recognize the advantages of ambiguity. It left more freedom for people to do what

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The book is divided into ten independent chapters: "Papal Roles," "The College of Bishops," "The Synod of Bishops," "The College of Cardinals," "The Roman Curia," "Vatican Officials," "Papal Leadership," "Vatican Finances," "Outside the Vatican," and "Toward the Next Millennium."

In some of the chapters, after giving the facts about a particular subject, suggestions are put forward on how the operation might be improved. They range from the trivial (change the location of the Vatican bookstore) to the more radical (heads of curial offices should not be bishops and/or let the prefects serve as *ad hoc* cardinals who would lose that ranking at the end of the pope's reign). As can be expected, the reader might agree with some of the author's comments, but others seem less than helpful. I think Reese is stronger when he is telling us how things are than when he says how things ought to be.

In the final chapter, "Toward the Next Millennium," Reese argues that incremental change is preferable to radical change when it comes to the operations of the Vatican. Modifications based on three pillars are suggested: (1) a decentralized vision of the universal church as a communion of churches; (2) the convening of an ecumenical council every twenty-five years; and (3) reorganizing the curia on geographical lines.

One inherent problem is the author's heavy reliance on anonymous sources. Some, including Cardinals Edmund Szoka and Edward Cassidy, don't seem to mind being quoted and they come across very well. The senior American cardinal in the curia, William Baum, is never quoted but doesn't seem to be an anonymous source either. Of course, some ecclesiastical wags say Baum can't talk about what he does at the Apostolic Penitentiary since it involves confessional material!

A difficulty in any book which relies on anonymous sources is the inability of the reader to assess the reliability of the source or the accuracy of the speaker's memory. For example, one source states that the Holy See agreed to consult the NCCB about any American priest being considered for a curial position. The source implies that the Vatican never lived up to the agreement. It's a minor point, but my own recollection of the issue is different. It is true that, in a series of meetings involving a delegation from the NCCB and high Vatican officials held in the mid-1980s, American curial staff were discussed. But in a "Memorandum of Understanding," the parties involved simply acknowledged the NCCB's willingness to help surface potential candidates if asked, and never to approve them prior to hiring. At the same time, to give the source his due, I don't recall the NCCB ever being asked to surface names for curial positions!

I think the chapter on Vatican officials is especially good. It is a narrative organizational chart of the inner workings of curial offices. Reese's style is clear, concise, and nonjudgmental. Combined with the chapter on the curia, *Inside the Vatican* tells us how things work "over there."

All in all, I think Reese gives a balanced picture of the structure, procedures, and people of the Vatican. If you are interested in political science, ecclesiastical style, this book is for you. □

Daniel F. Hoye, *a former general secretary of the NCCB/USCC, is pastor of Saint John the Evangelist Church in Attleboro, Massachusetts.*

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they wanted to do. You clear it up and you may get a very distinct and definitive answer, a no.

The documents of Vatican II have a lot of ambiguous, contradictory language, which allowed the bishops to vote for those documents with overwhelming majorities. Today we're fighting over how to interpret those documents. Everybody from right to left can find something to support his or her position. If you go to higher authority and say we want a definitive answer and explanation, they might give it to you. It might not be what you want to hear. And it might not be what's good. It might be too early.

STEINFELS: I'd like to turn to papal leadership and papal elections. Your book gives the impression that this pope is not a big fan of hands-on government. In this, he differs from his predecessors, Pius XII and Paul VI.

■ REESE: The image I had of the pope when I went to Rome was that he was not a good manager. I changed my mind. A good manager sets his own priorities and then does what he wants to do. That's what John Paul has done. If he had followed the style of Pius XII and Paul VI, he would have been captured by the curia. In fact, he's been his own man and put his own priority on the things he's wanted to do. At the same time, that means that he doesn't pay attention to a lot of major things that are going on in the curia.

STEINFELS: Does this make the pope a good manager?

■ REESE: He manages his time well. He pays attention to the things he considers important. He spends about a third of his time outside of Rome on trips. Still, he manages to run the Vatican curia. That's extraordinary. He's constantly working with people, even at breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

STEINFELS: As a political scientist, your assessment of papal leadership is pretty positive. You find that curial structures work surprisingly well considering their limited size and the range of expertise available to them.

■ REESE: If you like the pope, and the direction the pope is leading the church, the curia serves him well in supporting that vision. When John XXIII was pope, there was a period of time when there were serious questions about whether the curia was supporting the pope. That's not true today.

STEINFELS: If a pope reigns long enough, he presumably finally has a curia that is more or less serving his purposes. If so, the reforms you've been talking about need to be reforms that move outside the Vatican and relocate certain forms of power and authority.

■ REESE: That's why, when I started writing my book, I decided it couldn't be simply on the curia. That's why I have an early chapter looking at the college of bishops, at the ecumenical council, at the synod of bishops. The curia has to be put in the context of the college of bishops and the communion of churches. If you ask, how is the curia serving the pope in his ministry to the communion of churches, then there are a lot of consequences for reform.

Remember that the curia is not just a bureaucracy. It's also a court. It has the culture of a court. It has the dress of a court. It has the style of a court. That has an impact on a new pope when he comes in. You think the pope is this absolute power who can fire anybody in the curia and send the person off. You can't fire a noble. You can't fire an archbishop.

This is one reason that the people who work in the curia should not be bishops. They should be staff to the pope. They should not be part of the magisterium. They should not be in the college of bishops. The court character of the curia would be reduced if they were no longer bishops.

STEINFELS: At the end of the book, you say that there has to be an alternative vision of the church and the role of the pope if there is to be significant change. You talk about the communion of churches as an alternative view. In many ways that structure characterizes the Orthodox churches. But they, too, have certain kinds of problems that flow from the weakness of a system that is dispersed almost altogether.

■ REESE: The most serious problem the Orthodox have had through the centuries is their lack of independence from local government control. One of the great reforms accomplished by the papacy over the centuries was to take the appointment of bishops away from kings and nobles and centralize it in Rome. That was a reform. Now the question is: Do we need a further reform that decentralizes that power back into the Christian community?

Perhaps it is my background in American politics, but I believe in systems that have checks and balances. For example, it would be very important for the pope to have a role in the appointment of bishops by approving the choice made by the local community. In the ancient church, the bishop had to be elected by the clergy, approved by the people, and consecrated by the bishops of the region. That meant all three had to agree. If the clergy elected someone the people didn't like, they had to go back and try again.

STEINFELS: Are you proposing a return to this system?

■ REESE: Something that moved toward that would be an improvement.

STEINFELS: Not even Protestant churches have direct election of bishops.

■ REESE: I would not want direct election of bishops. Most people don't pay enough attention or care that much. Democracy is certainly not a divinely inspired system. All we have to do is look at our country and we know that. So I favor a system that has checks and balances; for example, the priests' council proposes three names, and one name has to be from outside the diocese. Or, the bishops' conference can propose an additional name. Then the pope picks one of the names that come to him. There's a great variety existing in how bishops are selected for the Eastern churches in union with Rome. There is a role for the clergy, for the local synods.

There are ways to give more power to the local communities without giving them total power over the selection of their bishop. I don't think they should have total power. We're part of the communion of churches, we're not sim-

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ply the church of Washington, D.C., or the church of Los Angeles.

Whoever is chosen as leader should be someone who maintains unity with the rest of the communion of churches. How's that done? Different ways need to be tried and experimented with. No way is perfect. But the way we're doing it now, we're getting bishops who tend to be out of touch with their local communities, and this is not beneficial.

STEINFELS: Your book spends a good deal of time on the synods of bishops. You suggest that the bishops at Vatican II intended the synods to play a more important role than they have.

■ **REESE:** The synods were something new, an attempt to continue what Vatican II had started, but without having to call together all of the bishops of the world. The purpose of the synods is to advise the pope. The difficulty with that is you can't advise someone unless you can tell him what he's doing wrong. Yet the whole culture of the church is that you never criticize the pope or say anything negative. For the synods to really work we need a change in mentality that makes it acceptable and proper for bishops to say, "Your Holiness, I think you're wrong here, and this is what you need to do." Or, "I think Vatican policy here is wrong. I think these changes need to be made." That's what it means to advise someone. Instead, the synod is a celebration of church unity, where everyone comes and says how wonderful things are, and how we all agree with our Holy Father. You see this in the way the Holy Father's speeches are extensively quoted by the members of the synod.

Structurally, I would suggest some changes: I don't see why the members of the Vatican curia need to be part of the synod of bishops, which should simply represent the churches around the world. This would reduce the size of the synod and would allow more people from outside Rome to attend. Many curial officials should be at the meeting, but they should be there only as staff.

STEINFELS: What other kinds of structural things would you recommend?

■ **REESE:** Getting the documents out on time. Allowing episcopal conferences to publish the results of their recommendations. We have all of this consultation, and never know what the conferences around the world have actually proposed to Rome.

STEINFELS: You quote defenders of the current system of synods as seeing the need for confidentiality as well as for reasons of protocol and diplomacy. They think that openness is not appropriate. For example, you cite an official who says that the bishops would come to Rome and have to say things for consumption at home, instead of speaking their mind.

■ **REESE:** There's some truth in that. Openness does have its limitations. That's why, for example, with the U.S. bishops' conference, I think they are right to have at least some of their meetings behind closed doors. Once a year they spend an afternoon talking about things they would rather not talk about in public. They talked about pedophilia for years behind closed doors. They talked about the problems of salaries for religious women behind closed doors.

I like the idea of more openness, but I don't think openness is the solution to every problem. Some things do need to be confidential. Certainly the bishops from Vietnam and China attending the synods have to be very cautious about what they say publicly because there can be very negative consequences for themselves and their flocks.

Still, more openness, more free discussion would be helpful. Bishops' conferences would know the results of discussions in other local areas before going to Rome. The members of each national bishops' conference would know how honestly their representatives spoke at the synod.

STEINFELS: You seemed to have thoroughly covered the hierarchy with *Inside the Vatican* and your earlier books. What's your next project?

■ **REESE:** I want to look at what might be the impact of the computer revolution on the church. I want to hold a conference that brings together computer experts, social scientists who study the impact of technology on culture and organizations, and ecclesiologists and church leaders, and then edit a volume of their ideas and suggestions. Historians say that without the printing press there would have been no Protestant Reformation. Now with the computer, wouldn't it be nice if we planned ahead a little better? □

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Richard Alleva

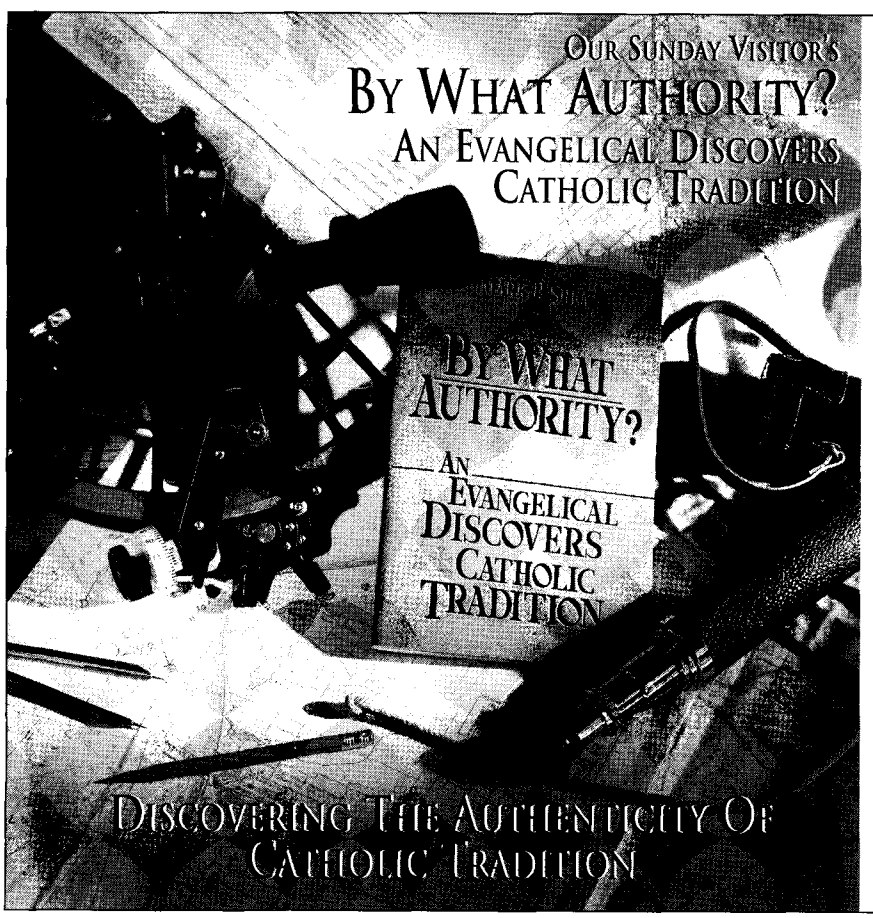
THE BARD IN AMERICA

'Looking for Richard' & 'Romeo'

Having performed *Richard III* on and off between movie assignments for the last two decades, Al Pacino decided to make his exploration of the play into a movie self-assignment. For his documentary, *Looking for Richard*, Pacino persuaded some Hollywood and New York talents to form a temporary and ill-paid company (Alec Baldwin good naturedly grouses on camera that "we're working for $40 a week and doughnuts"), and obtained permission to shoot several scenes at The Cloisters, a branch of the Metropolitan Museum that has a medieval look. The camera follows the star-director and his assistants as they scout other locations in New York, interview scholars and British actors at Stratford, England, set off a fire alarm by accident as they enter Shakespeare's birthplace, get thrown out of an outdoor café by New York's Finest for filming without a license, question New Yorkers on the street about what the play signifies to them (blank responses from everyone except one eloquent bum), and squabble among themselves about the project's progress.

Early on, Pacino tells us that the object of his theatrical and cinematic search is to discover just what *Richard III* can mean to us today, "us" being actors and audience. The answer is supplied in nearly every shot of this lively, bumpy, and very funny movie and it has nothing to do with deformity, political ambition, the nature of evil, or the divine right of kings, but everything to do with the eternal hunger of actors for great roles, juicy dialogue, and tantalizing acting problems.

Watching Alec Baldwin, as the doomed brother of Richard, control the fear in his face as he confronts his assassins and then casts about for a way to dissuade them, we understand exactly what Baldwin is working toward: the portrait of a smooth talker who can't quite con his way out of the ultimate tight spot. Listening to Kevin Conway speak the role of Hastings with diction that's lucid, pleasurable to the ear, and utterly American, we can hear the fact of American Shakespeare, a fact that has been with us since John Barrymore's Hamlet (if not Edwin Booth's) but is seldom acknowledged in the knee-jerk identification of British accents with the Bard. To see Wynona Ryder strug-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gle with the tricky psychology of Lady Anne yielding her body to her husband's murderer is to grasp how an actor can flounder, yet grow through floundering. Above all, watching Pacino himself arrive at rather glib solutions for his portrayal of Richard in the early Machiavellian scenes but then achieve an utterly convincing portrayal of the later, enthroned Richard as a kind of slow-moving deep-sea monster is to understand why Pacino has chosen to return to the role so many times. His journey has been long but getting there is all the fun.

Even in the days of silent movies, Shakespeare's plays were brought to the screen, and in these efforts the language was, of course, reduced to a series of captions. How strange that this should happen again in the sound period, only now with the actors able to speak their own captions.

For the script of the latest *Romeo and Juliet* isn't just an abridgment of the play; it's a specimen of clip art. Boz Luhrmann, the director, has extracted from each scene just those few lines that give enough information for the plot to function, plus a few more that are too beautiful or too famous to be jettisoned. His is a real "movie movie," its dialogue being just another component of the soundtrack along with gunfire, screeching brakes, and the slapping of surf onto the beach. That beach is Verona Beach in present-day Florida where this update is set as the portrayal of the rivalry of two gangster families.

Despite the absurdities any modernization entails (why does the state's governor allow his son, Paris, to marry into a gangster clan? how can the chief of police—Shakespeare's prince of Verona—banish a killer instead of locking him up?), Luhrmann almost pulls this stunt off. He is a clever filmmaker with a romantic sensibility drawn to high camp, and his last film, *Strictly Ballroom*, was a perfect marriage of romance and campiness. In *Romeo*, I enjoyed his send-up of the Montague-Capulet brawls as Sergio Leone showdowns right out of *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. I also liked

his transformation of the so-called balcony scene into a swimming pool dip, although the frustrated yearning that is usually emphasized by having the lovers occupy different levels is here pretty much lost amidst the splashing and gulping.

Courtesy of Don McAlpine's voluptuous photography, there are several haunting images, especially that of Romeo, having just killed Tybalt, falling to his knees before a huge statue of Christ. Looking down at the boy from camera's viewpoint above the plaster head and hearing Romeo scream "Oh! I am Fortune's fool!" as rain pelts down on him, we may feel the Latin-Catholic sensibility of both play and movie reach its exquisite apogee.

Leonardo DiCaprio, as Romeo, is fine at delivering such raw emotion, but his voice lacks range and trenchancy. Since, even in this version, Romeo is meant to be a poetic youth in love not only with love but with the expression of love (we first see DiCaprio scribbling his soliloquy as thoughts in a diary—nice touch!), the actor seems needlessly slack in every scene in which he doesn't scream, weep, or fight. By contrast, Claire Danes not only radiates dewiness but has the ability to infuse a passage such as:

> What's Montague? it is nor hand,
> nor foot
> Nor arm, nor face, nor any other
> part
> Belonging to a man

with a wonderful blend of naïveté and nascent lasciviousness (her sly shading of the last seven words) that I found delightful. Most of the rest of the cast is apt, with Miriam Margolyes (nurse) and Pete Postlethwaite (a very post-Vatican II Friar Lawrence) so fine that you wish they had more to do, which is the same as wishing they had more to say.

For when Shakespeare's people do something, it is usually by saying it. The bustle of Cinthio and Plutarch and Hollinshed is transformed by the poet into verbal hang gliding. In this movie, however, the eloquence has been reabsorbed by the bustle. The beginning of the balcony/swimming-pool scene (as entertaining as it is) is more concerned with whether a security guard will discover Romeo than with the stirrings of love. Before the final tragedy in the crypt, there is such a spectacular chase scene with police helicopters tracking the fugitive Romeo that you have to wonder if the cops won't burst into the church and interrupt the final soliloquies (which, of course, are reduced to practically nothing). In fact, midway through this film you may begin to wonder why there's any poetry at all. The few words left simply hold up the action—away with them! Spoiled by the acrobatics and gunfire that had gripped them for the first hour, the teen-agers at the screening I attended became fairly restive during the relatively talky pathos of the last half.

Shakespeare's plays have often been successfully transformed into works of art very different from their source. Think of Verdi's *Othello* and *Falstaff*, José Limon's ballet, *The Moor's Pavane* and, of course, *West Side Story*. But Luhrmann hasn't really transformed *Romeo and Juliet*. He's hyped it up and thinned it out. This movie challenges neither its actors nor its audience. It is Shakespearean snack food. □

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Critics' choices for Christmas

David Lodge

David Lodge's most recent novel is Therapy, *published by Viking and Penguin. A new book of essays,* The Practice of Writing, *will be published by Viking in January.*

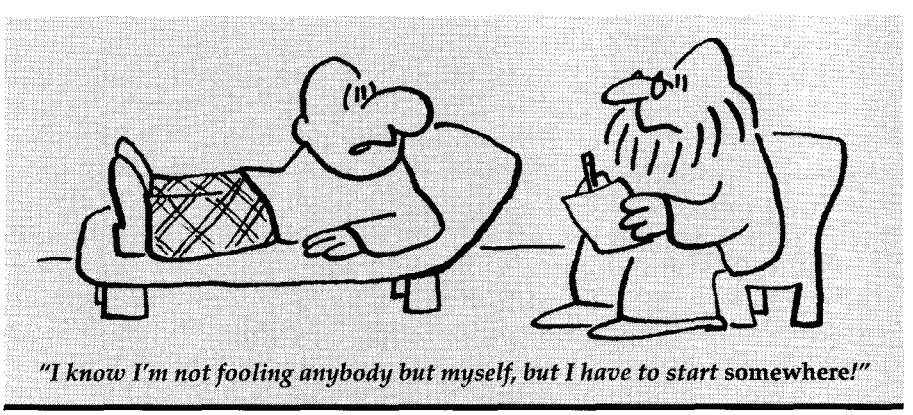
Richard Webster's *Why Freud Was Wrong: Sin, Science, and Psychoanalysis* (Basic Books, $35, 688 pp.) is not the first attack on the theory and practice of Freudian psychoanalysis, but it is exceptionally searching, lucid, and well-argued, and linked to an ambitious project for a true science of human nature which Freud, in Webster's view, promised but did not deliver. It is impossible to read this book without having one's respect for Freud shaken and diminished; but possible also to learn from it without accepting Webster's thesis that Freud's ideas were totally worthless. He demonstrates convincingly that the growth of the psychoanalytic movement corresponds closely to the historical development of religions, but this does not necessarily discredit either religion or psychoanalysis, if one believes they both answer some fundamental human need. An intellectually exciting, challenging book.

It's always interesting to learn about the private, personal, inner lives of one's professional peers and colleagues. This year I have read a number of revealing autobiographical works by people I first encountered either in print or at academic conferences as authorities in the field of literary theory and literary scholarship. Sir Frank Kermode, the *doyen* of English critics, published a beautifully written, painfully honest, and often dryly amusing memoir, *Not Entitled* (Farrar Straus Giroux, $23, 272 pp.) of which my only complaint is that it might have been longer. The account of his wartime service in the Navy reads like an inspired collaboration between Joseph Conrad and Evelyn Waugh.

Sandra M. Gilbert is best known as one of the founding mothers of feminist criticism (co-author of *The Madwoman in the Attic*), but she is also a published poet, and there is poetic eloquence as well as incisive analysis of the mystifications of medical and legal practice in *Wrongful Death* (Norton, $22.50, 352 pp.). This is a riveting account of the death of her beloved husband following a routine operation, and how she uncovered the negligence that caused it. It is also an illuminating meditation on the effect of sudden bereavement and how to cope with it.

Two other distinguished women professors have published confessional works this year. Susan Suleiman, professor of French literature at Harvard, movingly describes in *Budapest Diary: In Search of the Motherbook* (University of Nebraska Press, $25, 176 pp.) a series of visits to the country she left with her parents at the age of ten, and her efforts to recover, through memory and research, her Jewish, middle-European roots, and a fuller sense of her own identity. Jane Tompkins, revisionist historian of American literature at Duke, reveals a surprisingly vulnerable, anxious inner self in *A Life in School* (Addison Wesley, $22, 228 pp.). The book describes her growing disillusionment with the institutional structures and ethos of American higher education, and develops a utopian vision of how it might be changed for the better. (Ironically, for this reader, her ideal model has much in common with British universities as they were about thirty years ago.) All these books I think reflect in different ways the writers' dissatisfaction with impersonal, theory-driven academic discourse, and a desire to express feeling in some more direct and "creative" kind of writing.

In my year's reading of literary fiction, two novels by Indian writers stand out. *A Fine Balance* (Knopf, $26, 603 pp.) by Rohinton Mistry (resident in Canada since 1975) reminds one of nineteenth-century masters like Zola in its harrowing account of life among the poor and the very poor in India, but it is lightened by passages of exquisite deadpan humor, deadly political satire, and touching but unsentimental examples of redeeming human kindness. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize this year, and a worthy winner of the Commonwealth Prize. The winner of the Best First Book award in the latter competition was Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth & Pouring Rain*, which I read in paperback this



"I know I'm not fooling anybody but myself, but I have to start **somewhere!"**

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year (Little, Brown, $24.95, 560 pp.). Chandra teaches for half the year in America and spends the other half in Bombay. A pupil of John Barth at Johns Hopkins, he shows in this book an astonishing, precocious mastery of several different literary models—magical realism, adventure story, historical novel, and the modern novel of angst and alienation—and a Kiplingesque ability to embrace the contrasting cultures of East and West. I also enjoyed another outstanding British first novel, Kate Atkinson's droll, Shandean account of family life, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (St. Martin's, $22.95, 384 pp.) which won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award. But probably nothing gave me as much unalloyed pleasure as reading, for the umpteenth time, Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*, scrupulously edited with an informative introduction and notes by Richard Jacobs for the Penguin Twentieth Century Classics series. □

Kathleen Norris

Kathleen Norris's most recent book is Cloister Walk *(Riverhead). She lives in Lemmon, South Dakota.*

In our cerebral and ideological age, in which even churches seem in danger of becoming just one more place for conservatives and liberals to do battle, Christian poetry that is fully incarnational, firmly grounded in the five senses but also wonderfully transcendent, offers true refreshment. Anne Porter and Josephine Jacobsen are rare birds—that is, great Catholic poets who have won the respect of their peers in the secular, literary world. Both are not as well known as they deserve to be—Porter because she only recently published her first book, a collection of sixty years' worth of verse (*An Altogether Different Language*, Zoland Books, $10.95, 116 pp., and a National Book Award finalist), Jacobsen because she has, to quote one reviewer, written "only when she has had something significant to say." Her *In the Crevice of Time: New and Collected Poems* (Johns Hopkins University Press, $29.95, 258 pp.) is a welcome addition to American letters. I confess to an un-Presbyterian affection for an early poem, "Brother Peter Considers Mulroy Drunk under the Rosebush," with its evocation of God's "strange fierce love."

I find Anne Porter's exactitude breathtaking; in "The Shortest Days," which begins, "Hold out your hands, God my Father,/Because I want to give you my old age," she speaks of "tiny maple leaves...curling like birds' feet round the frost." In other poems, she offers prayers, psalmic praises, wonderment over the Eucharist brought at dawn to hospital patients, and reflections on child-rearing, marriage, and widowhood that are both sobering and joyful.

A book I read years ago, Margaret Miles's *Image as Insight*, helped me to return to church as an adult and find a home there. A new book, *Seeing and Believing: Images of Christian Faith* (drawings by Frank Kacmarcik, prose by Paul Philibert, O.P., Liturgical Press, $49.95,

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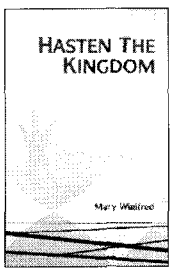

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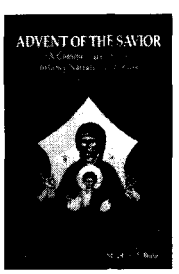

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Stephen J. Binz

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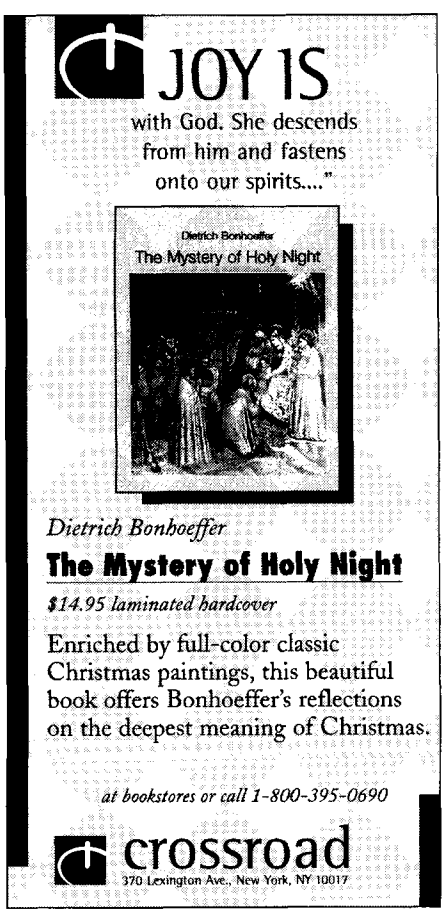
204 pp.), is one I wish I'd had access to when I was young. Its catechism of Christian images and symbols would have been of much greater use to me than the material I had to memorize for confirmation class (and then promptly forgot). More importantly, it would have given me a healthy alternative to the "demythologizing" of the Christian mysteries that was in vogue during the 1960s, when I was a young adult. These splendid drawings and meditations on such images as creation, the ark of the covenant, altars, bread, candles, the Mother of God, the Transfiguration, the Cross, the empty tomb, and Word of God would have been good nourishment. Bewildered by Christianity as I was being taught it, comprehending my role as an intellectual to be that of cutting God's miracles and mysteries down to size, I would have welcomed the deeply incarnational Christianity exemplified in Philibert's comment that "God's revelation is eloquent not only in words, but in the extended silence of the burning bush, the smoking mountain, the hovering dove, the descending tongue of flame, and the bread broken and shared. Our whole being must receive the good news—our eyes and other senses as well as our thoughts."

Good religious autobiography, writing that is never self-aggrandizing but manages to be self-revelatory in a useful, theological way, is a difficult art. This is why the scholar Roberta Bondi seems like a miracle to me. Grounded in the patristic era—her academic degree, from Oxford, is in the wild Christological controversies of the fifth century—she has, in two recent books (*Memories of God*, $14.95, 205 pp., and *In Ordinary Time*, $6.95, 205 pp., both Abingdon), turned toward plain speech and great storytelling. I have been able to share the books with intelligent high school graduates who are vaguely interested in religion, as well as well-educated, self-described "former Christians" who had lost sight of the fact that, as Bondi puts it, "theology is about saving lives."

Both of Bondi's books offer engaging and often humorous accounts of how she was "healed theologically" from the scarifying revivalism of her childhood, as well as the "abstract, logical, propositional, and systematic" God she encountered in graduate school, a God, and a theology, deeply suspicious of the subjective and personal. Her chapter on God the Father, in *Memories of God*, strikes me as a true blessing for our times: the often moving story of how a feminist woman began praying to God the Father in private prayer, and ended up not only better appreciating this metaphor in the Christian tradition, but also reconciling with her own father, a man with whom she had long had a fearful and strained relationship.

Speaking briefly of other books I have given as gifts this year, and will continue to pass on to friends, I'd have to mention Oscar Hijuelos's novel, *Mr. Ives' Christmas* (HarperCollins, $23, 248 pp.), in which a senseless act of violence straight out of today's headlines becomes a compelling tale of grief, forgiveness, and redemption. No small part of the book's power is that Mr. Ives sees himself as an ordinary Catholic, an ordinary Christian.

Many of the essays in an anthology edited by the poet David Rosenberg (*Communion: Contemporary Writers Reveal the Bible in Their Lives*, Anchor Books, $30, 547 pp.) have proved inspiring to my literary friends, many of whom haven't been to church in years and have lost their sense of what is in the Bible. The novelist Bradford Morrow, near death in an ambulance, finds to his surprise that the only thing in his mind is Psalm 23; my fellow Christmas critic, Valerie Sayers, who teaches writing at Notre Dame, has a brilliant and funny reflection on her childhood image of biblical women. The nuns would describe them as both "beautiful and good," which Sayers thought must mean they were something like "Miss Alabama in her white evening gown." Other standouts: Robert Coles on Ecclesiastes; Bharati Mukherjee on Hagar; Scott Russell Sanders on Amos and James. Also the novelist Laura Furman, a Jew, in an essay on the Epistle to the Hebrews, tells of being uncomfortable attending Mass with her husband's family, until at one funeral Mass she begins to comprehend what the Eucharist means for Catholics. As for Hebrews, she writes, "I see that there is more to the epistle...than exhortations to conversion. It is a moving articulation of faith and wonder at the sacrificial gift of Christ." Generous and healing words for Jew and Christian alike. □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Jack Schwartz

Jack Schwartz is the retired book editor of Newsday.

Mysteries are perhaps the most seductive literary genre because they appeal to the detective in us, the natural itch to solve a puzzle, the eternal child trying to discover how the magician has hidden the rabbit. Although for moderns, mysteries are driven by reason—the formidable logic and observatory powers of a Holmes—the ancients saw them as something to be wondered at, rather than explained. When a story

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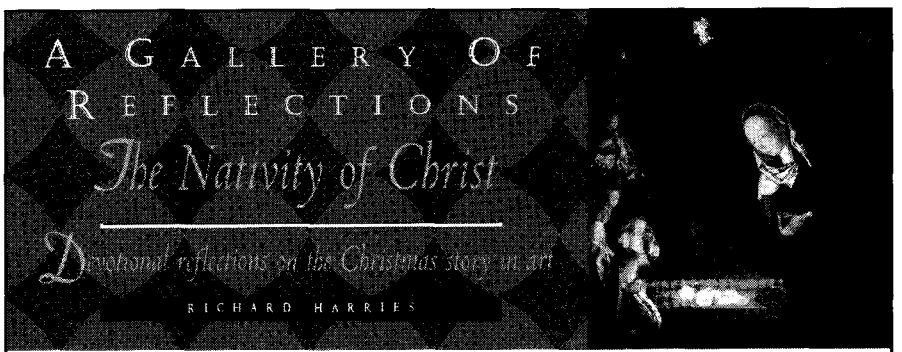
can unite both of these elements we are in a category of literary pleasure that transcends genre, and *Knowledge of Angels* (Bantam, $10.95, 268 pp.), by Jill Paton Walsh, does just that. Technically, the book is not a detective story, but it is an investigation: an inquiry into the nature—and the limits—of grace, perhaps the greatest mystery.

A stranger is shipwrecked on Grandinsula, an apocryphal island in the Mediterranean, at that eyeblink of time between the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. Despite its human travails, Grandinsula is close to an earthly paradise, lush, prosperous, and secure in the certitude of its universal Catholic faith. It is ruled benignly by Severo, an enlightened cardinal prince. The stranger, Palinor, is a prince in his own kingdom, a realm where science and tolerance abide—his authority at home derives from his skill as an engineer.

Palinor is also an atheist, a matter which is of little importance to him but of great concern to his hosts. A profession of faith—Saracen, Jewish, Pagan—is acceptable; even an acknowledgment of doubt since it allows at least the possibility of God's existence. With great equanimity and ease, Palinor rejects all this, creating a problem for Severo who comes to respect this atheist as a man of principle and is determined to save him from the penalty imposed on nonbelievers: the stake. To do so, he enlists his old friend, the devout scholastic Beneditx, for whom reason is a buttress in the tower of faith and God's existence can be demonstrated by logical proofs. Like Severo, Beneditx becomes entranced by the stranger's intellect and integrity, and anguished as he fails to shake Palinor's faith in his atheism. Into this tapestry is woven the separate tale of a wild child found in the mountains whose destiny will entwine itself with Palinor's.

The cardinal prince is worldly, wise, and generous—but still a man of his era. Jill Paton Walsh, perhaps known best for her children's books, has here written a very sophisticated novel and is careful to avoid the trap of historical figures talking in contemporary tongues. Her characters ring true to their own world. And it is a realm, for all its fabulous invention, whose shepherds, clerics, townsfolk, and nuns are all grounded in earthly reality. A critic may say that Palinor is too good to be true, but Palinor might say the same of God.

Wigan, an English coal-mining center in the late nineteenth century, may be an earthly hell compared to the Arcadian world of Grandinsula, but it is just as finely drawn in Martin Cruz Smith's *Rose* (Random House, $25, 364 pp.). Smith engages the reader from the first page, inviting us in, luring us until we are deliciously trapped in his story. Like Palinor, Smith's protagonist is an engineer, an outsider and an unbeliever—or at least a devout skeptic. There the resemblance ends. Jonathan Blair, too fond of the bottle, in disgrace for misappropriating Bible funds in Africa during his sojourn there as a mining surveyor (and worse, having "gone native" with black women), is on his last, fever-ridden legs in London. He is given a final chance at redemption by his erstwhile employer, Bishop Hannay, an Anglican prelate whose for-



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tune springs from the coal fields of Wigan which he rules over in baronial splendor.

A young priest, John Maypole, engaged to the bishop's daughter, has disappeared during a mining explosion, and Hannay wants Blair to discover what's happened to Maypole, whose passionate imitation of Christ brought his preaching from the pulpit to the pits. Blair's qualifications for the job are that he knows his way around mines, he is resourceful, and he's expendable. His investigations uncover a Boschian underworld whose moral depths plunge far below the deepest mines in the Hannay nether-realm. And as Blair unearths the macabre events of Maypole's disappearance we see through his jaundiced yet judicious eyes a sordid social topography: "antislavery" missionaries shilling for British colonialists; miners eking out a brutish living in a Hobbesian universe; the menacing, treacherous, backbending labyrinth of the mines pilloried by Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*—etched here in a carbon blueprint of Gehenna.

At the heart of the mystery is a pit-girl named Rose with whom Maypole became tragically obsessed and whose fatal allure casts a dangerous spell on Blair as well. *Rose* has so far not proved as commercially successful as such earlier Cruz-Smith works as *Gorky Park*. This is a pity because *Rose* may be Cruz-Smith's most ambitious book. Like the best detective stories, it explores the far greater mystery of a world re-imagined.

In a similar vein we have Sébastien Japrisot's *A Very Long Engagement* (Plume, $11.95, 327 pp.), a small pearl which may have been lost in the rough seas of publishing. To be sure, this is not a standard detective novel, which is a commercial weakness and a literary strength. You might say the book begins where the movie *Paths of Glory* ends. Five men have been convicted of shamming wounds during World War I and have been sentenced by the French military to a particularly gruesome death. Paradoxically, the manner of their execution is to set an example for their comrades but to be kept from their families. Yet Mathilde, the fiancée of one of the condemned, is not to be put off by these fabrications and is determined to find out what happened to her lover, Manech. Mathilde, confined to a wheelchair since a childhood accident, is a most determined and resolute detective. The victims of this judicial murder represent a wide swath of French society, and Mathilde's seven-year search takes us on a journey into the heart of France before, during, and after the slaughter of the Great War. We see families dismembered, hopes crushed, lives destroyed, men acting with heroism and desperation, their women responding with anguish, resignation, and rage. And we are transfixed by the mad "logic" of this war which breeds "only infamy, futility, and excrement." Mathilde is remorseless and indefatigable as she unravels the events that occurred in the no-man's land before a snow-filled trench called Bingo Crépuscule on the Sunday of Epiphany, 1917.

Along the way, Mathilde finds that there are other forces on both sides who wish to suppress her investigation for a complex array of reasons, both valid and villainous. Japrisot, the author of several French mysteries, has here written as much a story of romance as of detection—and its resolution satisfies both impulses. It is Gothic in structure but Gallic in tone. The colors and texture of Paris, of *la France profonde*, and of the trenches are palpable on the page, enhanced by the fine translation of Linda Coverdale.

All three of these richly painted and deftly narrated books could make wonderful films. But as literature they serve well enough as a feast for the mind and fare for the soul. □

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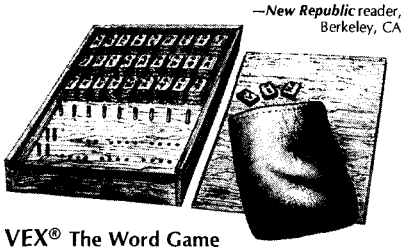

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Valerie Sayers

Valerie Sayers is professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. Her latest novel, Brain Fever *(Doubleday), was published this year.*

The best novels I've read this year are original, surprising, unique creations, but they share one trait: a generosity of voice and vision. And high time, too, I might add. We contemporary writers, after all, have been living in the literary age of The Self. Over the past couple of decades we have perfected the self-soaked story, the ever more personal essay (in which we boldly expose the once private sins of our relatives and lovers), and the big-contract memoir. How good it is to see novelists of imaginative empathy offering up work whose gaze is outward as well as inward; how good to hear a variety of American voices telling of the larger worlds, physical and spiritual, in which selves must make their ways.

Sometimes that way is almost beyond imagining. Diane Glancy's *Pushing the Bear* (Harcourt Brace, $22, 241 pp.) is a brave fictional retelling of the Trail of Tears, the nine-hundred-mile journey by thirteen thousand Cherokee forced off their land. Glancy recounts the bitter cold march in a multitude of voices, Cherokee and white; this narrative assemblage, which includes scattered bits of the Cherokee language—striking and beautiful on the page—is compelling. The storytellers' simple recounting of disease and death, often marked by abbreviated description or sudden silence, stands in stark contrast to the contemporary tendency to melodramatize cultural tragedy. Individual voices struggle to reconcile traditional religious belief and Christian belief with the terrifying reality of the march. The marchers are not portrayed as a gathering of innocents—several of the narrators sort tortuously through the power struggles that helped bring them to the trail—but the forgiveness and sacrifice of many of the Cherokee are transcendent.

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Tina De Rosa's *Paper Fish* (Feminist Press, $9.95, 157 pp.) must also construct its own culture-bringing language: the novel takes place in the forties and fifties in Chicago's West Side Italian community, a neighborhood surrounded by a city poised to swallow it. Poetic, exact, and crystalline, the narrator moves through the city and its characters' viewpoints, taking on different accents. At the heart of the story are a little girl and her Italian grandmother, two fierce and fully realized females. The plot circles, again and again, the central incident: the child, fearing her retarded sister will be institutionalized, runs away and is lost for three days. A story of resurrection, then, and in this case resurrection of the publishing as well as the fictional variety: *Paper Fish* was originally brought out in 1980 by a now-defunct small press, and quickly went out of print. This publication marks, I hope, its permanent presence in bookstores. It is a fine, quirky novel, and its domestic focus does not in any way narrow the themes it explores: identity, passion, sacrifice, forgiveness. De Rosa's fictional generosity is such that even God (who, the narrator tells us, is "delighted") makes an appearance.

Ron Hansen's *Atticus* (Harper Collins, $22, 247 pp.) is also about forgiveness; it is, in fact, a contemporary retelling of the story of the prodigal son. One of the novel's delights is its breezy, straightforward nod to its biblical and literary antecedents: Hansen explicitly confirms that he's reworking the parable, and also acknowledges his debts to *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Huckleberry Finn*. The novel is tightly and elegantly constructed as a murder mystery; the pleasures of that genre are considerably heightened by the gracefulness with which Hansen reveals his spiritual hand. Hansen—whose last novel, *Mariette in Ecstasy*, was a technical marvel—is a master craftsman, but his abiding strength lies in his balance of structure and content. He is unafraid to reveal the sometimes tawdry truth about his characters, and equally unafraid to reveal their tenderness and decency.

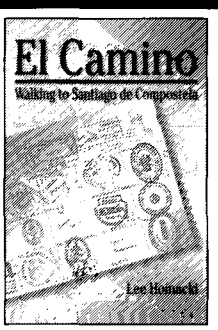
Fred Chappell pays homage to a different kind of literary forebear—the storytelling mountain folk of North Carolina—in *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* (Picador USA, $21, 228 pp.). Chappell's vibrant novel combines the urgent, rhythmic evocation of an old woman's death with a young boy's memories of women's stories. Chappell gives the women full voice, and those voices ring with mountain music: now longing, now foot-stomping. Tart metaphor and dry wit are the basic staples of their stories of tough, brambly mountain women. The storytellers peer into the shadows of their situations—rape, silencing—and move back, somber, to the light. Near novel's end, the women join their men for a square dance, and an observer feels that he is "standing near the origins of a strength that helped to animate the world, a power that joined all things together in a pattern that lay just barely beyond the edge of comprehension."

The novelist, of course, tries again and again to lay the pattern out. Each of these novels is structurally intricate; it is especially striking that while all four make some use of first-person narrative—that contemporary fictional voice of choice—they all balance the singular, interior voice with outside voices. These are novels that insist on our interdependence and our need to remember, to mourn, to witness, to celebrate, to sing, to forgive; they belong to the literature of community. □

David Gonzalez

David Gonzalez writes the "About New York" column for the New York Times.

A few months ago I found myself engaged in that tentative *pas de deux* that occurs whenever the subject of the Bronx comes up. The borough that is New York's only connection to the mainland is the place of my birth, a place I first explored as a child tagging along with my father on weekend errands to



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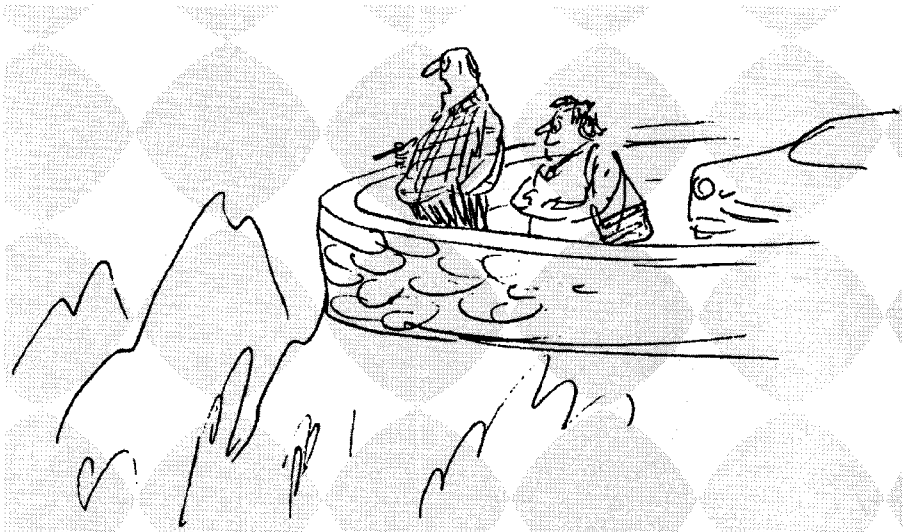

"Vista, shmista. Let's head back to the good old Bronx!"

pay the bills on our installment plan furniture. Later, as a reporter and a columnist, I would retrace many of those same trips, this time intent on ferreting out the stories of everyday life in this most misunderstood of places.

So, there I was, full of suspicion, as William Klein, the fabled photographer and filmmaker, asked me to take him to the Bronx.

"What do you want to see?" I asked, more than a bit worried about what would follow.

"I want to see the bombed-out Bronx," replied the expatriate artist, who was in town from Paris for a few weeks of interviews and assignments. "Is it dangerous?"

Only the question. I bit my lip and skipped lecturing him on the history of the borough's recent upswing that was brought about in no small part by organized congregations and other religious groups. Instead, I took him to Mott Haven, where we visited with a group of recovering drug addicts who have carved out a safe place for themselves. We walked through the streets, where teen-agers struck poses and mugged for him. We spent an hour chatting with dozens of senior citizens in an elderly center, as he excitedly snapped away at everything from a knot of leather-faced pool players to eager old ladies playing bingo.

This was not what he had expected. Then again, Klein should have had some empathy with the residents of a maligned borough. In the 1950s, publisher after publisher rejected a proposed book of his photos of New York which they deemed to be too raw, kinetic, and dark. Luckily, the French had no such qualms and gladly printed the book. This year the volume was reprinted in the United States as *New York 1954-55* (Dewi Lewis, $75, 256 pp.), offering a sense of vindication to Klein and a sense of our past to the rest of us.

The photos, large and grainy in starkly contrasting black and white, are startlingly modern in their vision. Klein's streetscapes are bustling with reflections and angular edges, jampacked with people, ads, and mood. Serendipitous moments leap from the page, like the sight of a grinning youth poking his head into the solemn line of marchers at a Saint Patrick's Day parade or a group of men in Little Italy gleefully hoisting a midget onto their shoulders.

One section is devoted to images of kids with toy guns; they point their pretend weapons in every imaginable direction and offer an ominous hint at the violence that the real thing in young hands would bring a few decades later.

But the real magic here is how Klein was able to get up close, in even the most seemingly impersonal situations, to capture moments of serene introspection in the midst of urban entropy.

A similar intimacy informs another book that partly takes place at the same time Klein was wandering the city with his camera. Oscar Hijuelos's *Mr. Ives' Christmas* (Harper Perennial, $23, 248 pp.) manages to portray a metropolis where religious devotion and even enlightenment are all around us. The tale is one man's search for meaning after his son, a would-be seminarian, is shot dead in front of a church one Christmas season.

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If Klein's book is about a city on the cusp of a new and turbulent area, Hijuelos's novel is about one man's life in the city that finally emerged from the clash of cultures and wills. With understated and tender passages, Hijuelos's rendition of New York is dead on in its portrayal of neighborhood life, especially when it comes to the day-to-day dealings with Ives's Latino friends on Claremont Avenue. He is just as accurate on the everyday acts of prayer and faith that sustain us, as in his depiction of the Muslim restaurant-owner kneeling in prayer or Jewish students streaming out of the seminary.

The power of Hijuelos's writing reaches its full dimension when Ives ventures upstate to meet the man, since reformed and released from prison, who shot his son dead so many years before. There is no great revelation, only the ordinary assurance that he is meeting a man who is trying hard to stumble forward despite his past. Ives is trying, too.

Hijuelos calls himself "a fan" of those people who manage, one way or the other, to hold onto their faith despite the cynicism of the world where the streets are full of danger and disbelief. He says that, since he wrote the book, he has often been approached by people who have lost children to violence and are searching for comfort or perhaps answers.

In his self-effacing way, Hijuelos says he has no answers, yet his book offers a challenge to those who would dismiss the idea of forgiveness as just a fairy tale. Ives's journey and his urge to forgive raise enough questions to shake the current popular beliefs about capital punishment as the only answer to murder.

Politicians who want to talk tough about crime like to raise all sorts of "what if" scenarios to push our buttons about the death penalty. How would you feel, I once heard an eager city councilman ask an audience, if your wife or daughter was raped and murdered? Wouldn't you want to avenge that death?

Mr. Ives' Christmas answers that question with an equally emotional "what if." □

Rosemary Deen

Rosemary Deen, poetry editor for Commonweal, *recently retired from Queens College where she taught writing.*

What I like in serious fiction are the pleasures of good drama: richly interesting characters caught in a grievous crisis presented in a highly condensed form, *and* the thrilling sweep, the history and information of epic and encyclopedia. And I want the opposition between readable brevity and boundless scope resolved by an original, complexly economic structure and flawlessly energetic writing.

Two books gave me these pleasures this year: *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman* by Andreej Szczypiorski (Vintage International, $9.95, 200 pp.) and E. Annie Proulx's *Accordion Crimes* (Scribner, $25, 381 pp.). Both engage a great sweep of national and cultural identity in crisis, Szczypiorski (pronounced sh-ch'-ep-yorski) in only 200 small pages and Proulx in nearly 400 pages of lightning prose, swift and deadly. Szczypiorski gives us Poland in Warsaw just before the Ghetto uprising in April, 1943, and Proulx goes through a hundred-year span in the United States beginning with the lynching of some Italians in New Orleans in 1891. Neither writes a linear story. They layer narratives, shift character focus in each section, and make the present back into the past and fast forward to the future.

The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman is pointlessly named in this English translation. Its Polish title, *Poczatek*, means "Beginning." The book has many centers, in seventeen fascinating characters, ranging from a judge, an old Polish nobleman; a peasant nun drilling rescued Jewish children in Catholic prayers and false identities ("What is your name?" asked Sr. Weronika. "Januszek," answered a black-haired, curly-headed boy with the smile of an old dealer in cow hides); a young man who had "chosen the career

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of a professional bandit, which in the era of great totalitarianism...was to become a pitiful anachronism" because "totalitarianisms themselves practice banditry in the guise of law"; a Jewish betrayer of Jews and a German officer; an old Socialist railway worker who can turn a wringer into a printing press because he understands not just machinery but "lies, truncheons, arrests."

Through these centers you come to sense Poland as a place where Europe and Asia have always met, and where now "2000 years of European civilization" meet the first crude and as yet unperfected form of totalitarianism. Both heroes and villains appear very matter-of-factly. The betrayer is distressed because the world is full of lies. The little tailor dies silently, apparently by mistake and without witness, against a wall, but when the lorry bearing his body has been driven away, a woman dips her handkerchief in his congealing blood and bears it away "as a symbol of human martyrdom." In this structure of many centers, each life expands, opens out so you can see its origin, and ramifies to its end, all the while touching, connecting, meshing with the other ramifying lives. You finally realize you are seeing a whole culture and society as a living tissue. And it will hold.

Accordion Crimes shows us the "ethnic" and its dark other side: prejudice, virulent and commonplace. The middle class, the stuff of novels, scarcely appears here. The eye has become the ear; no character has any formal education, so the culture of the eye, reading and the visual arts, is absent. The scores of characters are aliens, quite other than the sort of person who can read the book, but vivid and unforgettable. There is one center, a little green accordion, made in Sicily and brought to New Orleans, and it is fated for destruction in the natural course of a hundred years because it is only an instrument of popular culture. But the cultures through whose hands it passes—the Sicilian, German, Mexican, French-Canadian, Cajun, Polish, Irish, Basque, Norwegian, and black traditions—fade and are lost. The grandson of a great Cajun musician "imitated his grandfather's singing style with eerie accuracy for a year, then slid over to swamp pop." Finally, dried and soundless, the accordion is run over by a highway truck, scattering the fourteen $1000 bills an earlier owner had sequestered within it, in an image like the gold dust blowing away at the end of *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

The author's voice is always detached, brisk, business-like as a well-written newspaper, no matter what bizarre tortures she bestows on her characters. The detachment, the fierce energy, the wild ordinariness of the grotesque—Proulx is very like Swift, who I always thought was incomparable. Through this voice goes the other voice, of the music: "vibrant and keening," "wailing," "a voice like a blooded dagger," "breathy, sobbing roars," "sonorous, plangeant, shouting for grief to the mountain slope." The little accordion's notes fall "biting and sharp...hollowed with pain," like the effect of Proulx's own prose. The most remarkable passages in the book are the vivid, precise evocations of music most of us would find unimaginable.

The other astonishing fact of the book is the grasp of Proulx's research, all with the intense feel of primary source materials. The range and clarity of absolutely right detail is staggering. Proulx has a formidable genius, and here is its creation, a hundred years of an America you'll never meet so remorselessly anywhere else. □

Bernard Bergonzi

Bernard Bergonzi, recently retired from the University of Warwick, writes from England.

One of the books I most enjoyed in the past year is Sir Frank Kermode's *Not Entitled: A Memoir* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, $23, 272 pp.). Kermode is a distinguished critic and literary scholar who has been a professor at the universities of London, Cambridge, and Columbia; he is now retired from teaching, but still actively writing. He was born on the Isle of Man, so grew up feeling not quite an Englishman. After his secluded, literally insular childhood, he studied at Liverpool University and then went into the Royal Navy during the Second World War. He never had to face the enemy and spent much of the war stationed on a larger and bleaker island, Iceland. But the bleakness and boredom of life there were enlivened by his fellow seamen and officers, whom he presents as a memorably bizarre collection, particularly the commanding officer, who devoted the resources of the ship to furthering his black-market activities.

Kermode writes entertainingly of human oddity and knavery, with a keen sense of the ludicrous, and equally well about the sea, which could be as threatening as the absent enemy and which he learned to treat with respect. In later years Kermode achieved fame and distinction, but finds something slightly absurd in the hype. He describes the academic and literary personalities of his day with a cool but not contemptuous eye. In his seventies he has revealed an unsuspected gift for comic writing, though it is combined with a gentle, pervasive melancholy.

During the war years when Kermode was a seaman, I was a schoolboy in England, and I well remember the presence of American soldiers and airmen, who wore crisp and unfamiliar uniforms, chewed gum, and were brash and self-confident, at least on the surface. Eventually there were millions of American military men on British soil, where they prepared for the 1944 invasion of the Continent. The history of their stay and of their complex interactions with the population—especially the interactions that resulted in numerous British GI war brides—has been brilliantly recounted by David Reynolds in *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain 1942–44* (HarperCollins [London], £25, 588 pp.). This book is both a scrupulous work of academic research, thoroughly documented, and a rich, readable study of human relations at a time of crisis and disruption. British males complained that the Americans were "over-paid, over-sexed, and over here" (the women were less critical), to which

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the Americans retorted that the British were "under-paid, under-sexed, and under Eisenhower."

A more light-hearted account of Anglo-American cultural exchange is Bill Bryson's *Notes from a Small Island* (Morrow, $25, 240 pp.), which was at the top of the British paperback best-seller list for months. Bryson is an American writer who loves England, lived there for many years, and has a British wife. Eventually, though, he decided to return to America with his family to edit fiction at the *New Yorker*. Before he returned to the States he took the trip round Britain that he describes in this book. He made a perverse, perhaps desperate decision to do all his traveling by public transport (if there was any—sometimes he had to abandon his hope of getting to a place to which there were no buses or trains); he also covered quite a bit of ground on foot. Sometimes he stayed in fairly decent hotels, but more often he put up in humble bed-and-breakfasts. He still managed to get round a lot of England, with a foray to the North of Scotland.

Bryson is a superb comic writer who sees the funny side of everything that happens to him, even if it wasn't all that funny at the time. Having lived a long time in Britain, he knows how things work and is not put off by the merely unfamiliar, but preserves enough of an outsider's eye to register the absurd, the inexplicable, and the occasionally infuriating aspects of British life, and to joke about them and his reactions. He begins one chapter, "I took a train to Liverpool. They were having a festival of litter when I arrived. Citizens had taken time off from their busy activities to add crisp packets [potato chips], empty cigarette boxes, and carrier-bags to the otherwise bland and neglected landscape." I know only too well what he is on about, and am grateful for his good humor. This must be one of the funniest books of the decade.

Finally, I want to mention an outstanding first novel, Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (St. Martin's, $22.95, 384 pp.). This is a working-class family saga, set in the ancient city of York, though well away from its tourist attractions; the time weaves back and forth from the late nineteenth century to the present day. The novel is formally sophisticated, but tremendously alive—variously sad, comic, angry; however somber the material, Atkinson displays an attractive and delicate touch. She shows that the traditional realistic novel, so often dismissed by literary theorists, still has plenty of life in it. □

Chet Raymo

Chet Raymo teaches at Stonehill College in North Easton, Massachusetts, and writes a science column for the Boston Globe.

In recent years we have enjoyed a renaissance of writing by scientists for a popular audience. Not since the heyday of Thomas Huxley and John Tyndall in the late-nineteenth century have we had so much accessible prose from the makers and shakers of science. Among the very best of the scientists writing today are Richard Dawkins and Stephen Jay Gould.

Dawkins is an evolutionary biologist who occupies the newly endowed Charles Simonyi Chair of Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University; he is best known for his ground-breaking book, *The Selfish Gene*. Gould is professor of zoology and geology at Harvard, author of many popular books on evolution, and probably, after Carl Sagan, the most widely known American scientist. Both men have just published books that are joys to read—and which shake up some of our most cherished convictions. Anyone interested in the fluid interface between science and faith will find these books irresistible.

Dawkins's *Climbing Mount Improbable* (Norton, $25, 340 pp.) and Gould's *Full House: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin* (Harmony Books, $25, 244 pp.) are in-your-face challenges to the notion of human primacy and necessity in cosmic history. Both authors are smart, articulate, and certain of the righteousness of their cause; both seem to

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delight in their roles as gadflies from Olympus. Their message is the same: Darwinian natural selection is the key to understanding our place in the great scheme of things. And what do we learn from Darwinism? That the human species is a contingent and wholly dispensable twig on the tree of life.

Most of us will react to this deflating pronouncement with a smirk, smile, or frown. Who are these guys to tip us from our place on the top rung of the ladder? And why are they having so much fun doing it?

Dawkins sets out to show how blind variation and natural selection can produce a Noah's Ark of plants and animals that look "designed." He takes on the favorite argument of creationists: Some aspects of nature—the human eye, for instance—are so perfect in their form and function that it is utterly improbable that they might have been produced by the accumulation of chance variations. Dawkins showers us with "obviously designed" examples of biological complexity: for example, the wonderfully subtle symbiotic relationship of fig wasps and figs. Then, like an indiscreet magician, he shows us how the trick was done, how nature fashions exquisite order using nothing but Darwinian sleight of hand.

What makes Dawkins's argument so convincing is his use of computers to create artificial worlds where chance variations and selection do in fact lead to artifacts that have the compelling look of "design." Yes, the human eye seems an unlikely artifact of chance, but it turns out to be surprisingly easy to fashion an "eye" on a computer using only random incremental variations and an algorithmic surrogate for natural selection. This is what Dawkins calls "climbing Mount Improbable."

Gould's agenda is even more provocative. He has made something of a career of poking holes in our presumptions of biological primacy. The medieval idea of a Great Chain of Being, ascending from the lowliest creatures to humans, has nothing to do with the world described by science, he says. In the real world, variation, not progress, is supreme. We ascend together—bacterium, lowly worm, philosopher—arm-in-arm, so to speak, adapting to our respective environmental niches, spreading excellence across the board. In Gould's view of things, the bacterium has as much right to claim primacy as we do. Perhaps more right, since bacteria have been and will probably always remain the most enduring and populous life form on the planet.

We are the tail end of a bell curve of randomly generated variation skewed toward complexity because it can't go the other way (life can't get much simpler than bacteria). The mode of the curve (where the greatest numbers lie) is still solidly with microorganisms. The common error we make, says Gould, is assuming that our presence at the tail of the curve is a result of "progress" rather than a statistical consequence of an expansion of variation. The great fun of Gould's book is the way he illustrates his argument by considering the decline of .400 hitting in baseball. This is often interpreted as "they don't make 'em like they usta." Gould demonstrates that the so-called trend from .400 hitting results from the spread of excellence among batters, pitchers, and fielders—in other words, a contraction of variation.

OK, so we are the tail of a skewed curve rather than the preordained glory of creation. But at least it's our tail. We are the most complex of creatures, the inevitable consequence of variation and the spread of excellence—we are still the apple of God's eye. Gould doesn't even allow us this consolation. "Humans are here by the luck of the draw, not the inevitability of life's direction or evolution's mechanism," he says. Replay evolution, and the outcome would be entirely different. Our notion of necessity, like our notion of primacy, is a narcissistic illusion.

No one will deny that humans are inclined toward self-importance. Nevertheless, I doubt that many of us will warmly embrace Dawkins's or Gould's deflating arguments. The idea of our preordained primacy is deep within us, embedded in our myths and legends, enshrined in our theologies, perhaps even hardwired into our brains. For this reason alone, these two engaging books by two of our cleverest evolutionary biologists are welcome antidotes to the possibility of presumption—or at least they should be welcomed by anyone who seriously wants to measure the content of faith against the raw lessons of the world. □

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A LITTLE CELLO MUSIC

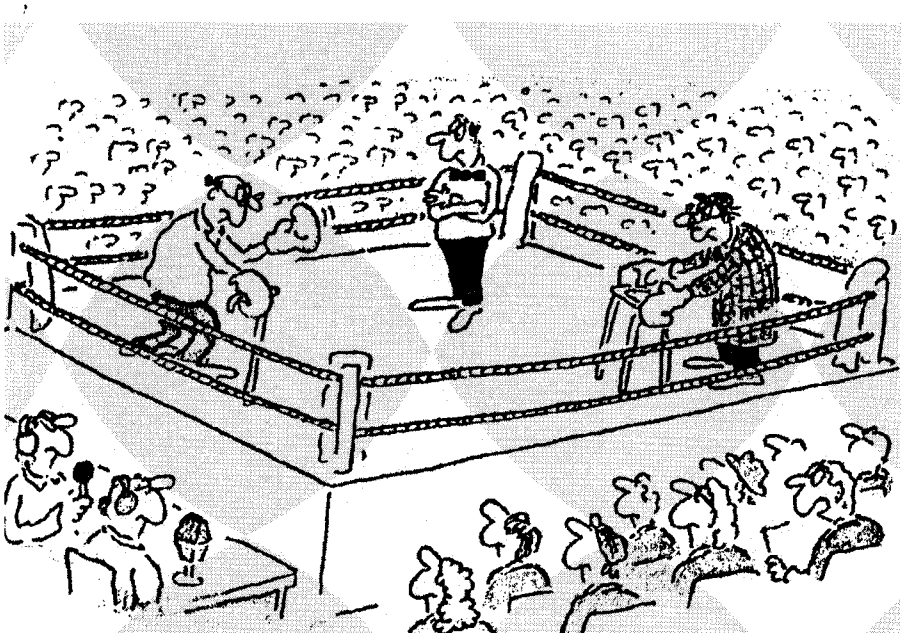
Valerie Schultz

My husband is taking cello lessons. He practices a scale, up and down, and the sound swells the house. It is not yet melodious—more like a mama grizzly in labor, or a headache that has not quite visited the temples. At best the low notes rattle on the breastbone like a horror-movie soundtrack—impending doom, close-up on the victim's hand reaching for the knob: DON'T OPEN THAT DOOR! Our children shut themselves up in their bedrooms. Our dog scratches at the back entrance, begging for mercy.

The cello itself is a thing of beauty, despite the unlikely growls coming from it. Its polished wooden curves glow in the lamplight. It nestles between my husband's legs, a lovely place to be, and he draws the bow across its strings smoothly, caressingly, his ear bent to hear the notes. He looks peaceful and, if he weren't wearing blue jeans, of another century. He makes an occasional sound, whether of dismay or satisfaction I cannot tell.

And as crazy as it is—he doesn't have the time, we don't have the money, he's thirty-six years old, for God's sake—I love him for this. I love him for bringing this enormous instrument into the house and driving us all to distraction. I love him because he looks at a cello and is not daunted.

My husband has always been willing to try new things. It is a quality that often led him to grief in his adolescence, but that serves him well as an adult. In his teaching career he is a groundbreaker, a forward thinker. As a father he is a first-rate adventurer, building doll houses from scratch and trying out new recipes and scaling ever greater heights of computer literacy with our children. And as much as our children roll their eyes at the introduction of this velvety-throated stranger in the large zippered case, they are taking it in. They see that a person is never too old to grow.



"I wish boxers would stop coming out of retirement."

Deep in his heart, my husband has always wanted to play the cello. He has music in his soul. When I first met him, he was never without his harmonica. He carried it the way some men carry a pocket knife, ready with some blues for any situation. Music of all kinds has always filled our house; the radio is always on in the car. He has taught our children to play the recorder, and has made up songs with goofy lyrics for them since their births. He lucked onto a cello teacher, complete with an instrument to loan, while setting up a music program for the school where he teaches. A boyhood dream was by chance fulfilled, the important lesson being that his dream was still accessible to his everyday consciousness. Mine are not so close to the surface.

So often we teach our children the defeats and surrenders of adulthood. We tell them how we could have been contenders—if only, if only. We urge them to learn from our mistakes, even though we do not. Reach for the stars, we say, as our hands dangle earthward. Never stop trying, never stop dreaming, we say; but if we ourselves, in little things and large, no longer try or dream, that is what we teach.

That is why I love my husband so, as the squawks and grunts emanate like digestive problems from his cello, as he squints at the music on the stand, as he plays his piece. All the tired lessons, like practice makes perfect, and try, try again, and the one about the new leaf—all spring to life as he embodies them for us, he and his blessed, bellowing cello.

He's almost got "Moon River" down. By Christmas I expect we will hum along to bass-clef carols. Even among the angels, there must be some who sing with unlikely voices. □

Valerie Schultz *lives in Tehachapi, California.*

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